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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 12th 2023 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, August 15th, 2023. Call lasted 71 minutes. 50 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:

Grist Magazine, Max Graham
KZPA Fort Yukon

Political Representatives participating:

Communities participating:

Old Crow
Dawson
Fairbanks
Tanana
Galena
Russian Mission
Holy Cross
St. Mary's
Pilot Station
Kotlik

Management Reports:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Bonnie Borba, Research Biologist, ADF&G - The fall chum salmon projection based on inseason assessment projects indicates a run size of near 300,000 fish, compared to an average run size of near 900,000 fish. Mixed stock analysis (MSA) was applied to the passage estimates at the Yukon River mainstem sonar, operated near Pilot Station, to remove summer chum salmon and resulted in an estimate of 195,000 fall chum salmon in the river as of August 21, compared to the median of 648,000 fish, for this date. The cumulative CPUE for LYTF is below average and MVTF is above average. The three-quarter point for fall chum salmon typically occurs on August 19 at LYTF and August 18 at MVTF. The next batch of scales for the second fall chum

salmon pulse are on the way to the lab to be aged and results will be reported next week. The percentage of female chum salmon through August 21 was 52% which is below the historical average of 57%. The average length of 572 mm is well below the historical average of 592 mm, however they are much larger than the previous two years. Genetic sampling is being used to distinguish the fall component throughout the run. Genetic mixed stock analysis on chum salmon that passed the mainstem sonar from August 1–13 indicated approximately 10% were summer chum and 90% were fall chum salmon. The fall chum salmon stocks consisted of 54% Border/US (Teedriinjik, Sheenjek, and Draanjik), 13% Canadian, and 23% Tanana Fall stocks. For fall chum salmon this represented 85% U.S.-origin and 15% Canada-origin stocks. Chum salmon entering the river the remainder of the season should be primarily fall chum salmon. The fall chum salmon drainagewide escapement goal ranges from a minimum of 300,000 to 600,000 fish, and there are also several individual tributary goals. The sonar project on the Teedriinjik began operations on August 8 and has a cumulative passage of 4,800 fall chum salmon, which is below the median passage of 13,000 fish. The first-quarter point for fall chum salmon typically occurs on September 5 at this project. The escapement goal on this system is 85,000 to 234,000 fall chum salmon. The sonar project on the Sheenjek River began operations on August 6 and has a cumulative passage of 411 fall chum salmon, which is below the median passage of 2,800 fish. The first-quarter point for fall chum salmon typically occurs on September 7 at this project. The Eagle sonar, on the mainstem Yukon near the U.S./Canada border, will also transition to counting fall chum salmon sometime in August after the passage of Chinook salmon. Based on travel times the first major pulse of fall chum salmon will reach the mainstem Yukon River border mid-September and the second pulse coming in now would be in the area the last week of September. The mainstem Yukon River sonar operated near Pilot Station has a cumulative passage of 14,904 coho salmon, which is well below the median of 67,000 fish. The midpoint of coho salmon passage is typically August 22 at that site. The sonar, LYTF and MVTF are all showing late and weakness in coho salmon passage to date. Coho salmon passage is on the increase as the recent pulse is now reaching the mainstem sonar site. Coho salmon are typically slower than fall chum salmon due to smaller body size.

Deena Jallen, Emmonak, ADFG Summer Season Manager of Yukon River - Not much to add. See final counts in Eagle to get the final count of chinook. Water temps cooled down. Lots of rain. Let Canadian neighbors know they are in our thoughts with all these fires. Thank everyone for participating.

Christy Gleason - Yukon River Fall Season Manager ADFG - Beginning last Friday, we have been seeing a group of fall chum and coho salmon come into the Yukon River. The salmon run is still very low and there's not enough fall chum salmon to harvest. We have 195,000 fall chum salmon in the river and we're near the three-quarter point of the run. We are still below our drainagewide escapement goal of 300,000-600,000 fall chum. Fall chum salmon fishing will remain closed. We are starting to see coho now, but the run looks late and weak so far.

Fred West, Summer Season Research Biologist - All projects are going into post season analysis. Results will come out later this fall.

Mark Ross, Manager, Treaties, Fisheries and Salmon Enhancement (Yukon River) - DFO technicians are still present at the Eagle sonar locations in Alaska, where collaborative efforts with ADF&G are underway for sonar operations and test fishing. Chinook salmon of Canadian origin continue to migrate passed this site, in decreasing numbers, and they will be switching to

monitor chum salmon in the near future. As with the community of Old Crow, our technicians evacuated the Porcupine Sonar camp on August 9 due to nearby wildfires. The evacuation was recently rescinded and our crew is back in the camp, however, data is only current to August 7 at the moment where the count was 642 Chinook salmon. This compared to 349 on that date last year and the project average of 2,684. With our sonars yet to be fully functional following the evacuation, we have yet to report chum numbers for the Porcupine River. However, on this date last year there was an estimated cumulative passage of 421 fall chum, with the project average of 1,183. Our crews will be heading to the Fishing Branch River later this week, where they will begin set up of camp, including the weir and sonar and begin with the fall chum enumeration. I will provide an updated count once available, likely on the September 5th call. The Klondike River sonar, managed by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in in Dawson City has estimated 240 Chinook salmon as of August 16. This compared to 245 on this same date last year and an average of 699 between 2010 to 2011 and 2020 to 2022. The Pelly River sonar, managed by Selkirk First Nation, has been in operation since July 6th. As of August 21st, an estimated count of 1,818 Chinook salmon have passed the sonars, compared with 4,830 on that date in 2021. This stands in contrast to the average count of 6,959 for the project spanning the years 2016 to 2021. The operation of the Big Salmon River sonar commenced on July 14th. As of August 19th, an estimated 1,632 Chinook salmon passed the sonar, compared with 1,889 on that date in 2021 and the 10-year average of 4,623. Beginning this year, the Teslin Tlingit Council has a sonar operation in the Nisutlin River. Located in close proximity to the community of Teslin, this river is integral to Teslin watershed Chinook. The project has been active since July 16th, and up until August 13th, an estimated count of 434 Chinook salmon have passed the sonar site. The fish ladder and observation area at Whitehorse Rapids Fishway has recorded 44 Chinook as of August 18, compared with 58 on that date last year and the 10-year average of 526. Environmental Conditions: It has been a very warm summer across much of the Yukon, with water temperatures elevated in many systems throughout the season. We are currently experiencing a cool down and seeing water temperatures drop accordingly. This will be more favorable as salmon migrations and spawning continue. Water levels remain consistent with previous updates. Not much changed. Fisheries closed at this time for all aspects. Not anticipating a change.

Holly Carroll Yukon River Subsistence Fishery Manager, USFWS - Not much to add. Will stand by for questions that might come up.

Jacklyn Kendall, Fishery Manager, Yukon River - For Chinook the current passage estimates from Eagle Sonar continue to be low for Canadian origin Chinook salmon, in light of this there is no change to the current Canadian Management strategy. The priority will remain focused on maximizing the number of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon reach their spawning grounds in order to sustain future returns. There are no harvest opportunities for Chinook and DFO will maintain closures in the Chinook public angling (recreational), commercial, and domestic (non-indigenous food fishery) fisheries. Moving into fall chum, although current projections have slightly increased the number of Canadian-origin fall chum expected based on the summer to fall relationship, results from genetics will provide a more accurate in-season forecast of Canadian-origin fish and will help guide management going forward. We will continue to monitor the run very closely, however recent forecast updates suggest the run is not materializing and DFO will maintain current closures in the Public Angling (recreational), Commercial and Domestic fisheries for fall chum.

CANADA

Elizabeth MacDonald, Council of Yukon First Nations - School started. Evacuations ended. Weather we got was fallish weather last week (cooler). In Between chinook and chum run. First Nations don't fish chum as much. Chum at Porcupine are the most fished salmon.

Community level reports:

Old Crow: Stan Njooblie - Weather has been windy. SW wind 20-30 mph. River kind of low. Water temp is warm. Talking to sonar crew before they evacuated, the correct number was 400 chinook going up the Porcupine river. Been two days since evacuation. No immediate threat. No fire. No smoke. About 70 hectares up there. Toxic. Had that kind of fire in St. Marys last year. See how that affects water drainage and salmon next year. Couple people have whitefish nets in. no sign of chum coming up here to date. Probably looking at three to four days before we see fall chum come in. a couple summer chum have been caught. no fall chum. There are three types of chum. Summer, first run fall, and later fall chum. They have names for them. It will be interesting to see what's happening. Looks like it's going to rain next week.

Whitehorse: Elizabeth MacDonald - Lots of bear activity in the Whitehorse area.

District Y6abc:

Shannon Erhart TCC - Brian concluded site for mid river sonar. Went from the Yukon River bridge. Looking at TOPO maps. Been in contact with ADF&G for steps on using sonar. Will have more to report after the season or when this call picks back up.

District Y5abc&d:

Tanana: Rapids Camp Stan Zuray - Water levels are down to lowest all season. No nets in water at Rapids and no households still operating an open camp. All have left or have cleared beaches of fish racks and cutting tables and mostly moved to town. Beluga whale not seen for days now after spending over a week at Rapids. No nets in water seen from Tanana to Rapids two days ago also and almost no boat traffic either. Pretty dead for what used to be prime fall fishing time just a few years ago.

District Y4a,b,c:

Galena: Howard - Water getting low enough to see the numbers of fish in lakes in the area.

District Y3:

Russian Mission: Basil Larsen - Been raining. Wind finally changed from NE to SW. Promising sign for fish. Water dropping steadily. Propbably fish out there. Berry picking season. Blues are ripe and popping. People switching to raspberries. Most spots wiped out at upper end of the islands. Crowberries, like currants. Find them at upper end of the island. It's like a bulldozer went through and plowed everything out. It's all pretty much like water from the flood. No fishing going on. People set whitefish nets before going out picking berries. good, healthy whitefish without infection, all healthy. Lots of pikes in the creeks, like alligators get caught by lips. No dip netting. Canoers passed through; they started at Whitehorse. Our summer has been windy and cold. Work going on. Brice Construction brought in gravel at the old runway. They're stockpiling gravel there. Not in process of putting it on the runway yet. Giving two people a chance to operate per day. Lots going on with tribe and city. No fishing. Lots of questions about when we will be able to fish. We all know about 100k was the end of summer chums. Water

dropping fast. Everyone into picking berries. My family's trip we saw one moose. The moose we saw was a big adult, up to its stomach in water. Not good for subsistence for harvest (not good ground) you'll sink to your chest if you go into a meadow. Lots of wolves and bears. Moose taking a hit. People starting to notice. When looking for fresh meat, there's nothing. People looking haven't seen anything. People picking seeing bears. We keep our distance. Will hunt for them when they fatten up and its colder. Everyone watching out for whales knowing there's silvers out there. One of our family trips couple miles upstream never saw fish carcasses before but saw a bunch last time we went. All summer chum. Went to another creek in Kako. Went there and saw lots of carcasses and bear sign. Lots of change in the last few years. There was no sign before. Starting to see carcasses at local spawning grounds. Hearing little kids calling geese. Hearing a bunch of that now.

Holy Cross: David Walker - Nothing to report. Nobody is fishing. River dropping fast. Unusual. Water rises in August when silver salmon comes up. Everyone is resorting to jobs.

District Y2:

St. Mary's: Bill Alstrom - Thank Basil about giving his report. Alstrom creek there is no humpies; usually clogged with humpies. Andreafski haven't heard? Fish weir closed down. Other than that, cold, rainy, wet summer.

Pilot Station: Martin Kelly - Folks berry picking.

District Y1:

Kotlik: Marvin Okitkin - Like everyone said. Lots of rain. SW winds mean fish in the river. People seeing fish outside Kotlik Slough. I've seen daily too, going up. Water levels dropped to normal levels. See sandbars, new all over. Water temp 55.7. Warmer than air temperature lately. Saw one while putting up fall fish. I set a 60ft 3.5" whitefish net when we went to check on berries outside the Yukon. One sheefish and one humpback whitefish. Salmon are coming in. I know if we'd be commercial fishing we'd load up and catch but that's just a memory on that part.

BBAYK:

Karen Gillis, BSFA Executive Director - Want to remind folks they can email me at karen@bsfaak.org if they would like to participate and listen in on Bristol Bay and Kuskokwim every Thursday at 9am. Have a presentation coming up. Contact Serena or email me. You can call 907-887-1148 if you'd like to join in. This call is primarily for residents of Kuskokwim and the Bristol Bay regions or others who are interested or task force members or those that have a direct link to this region.

Open Discussion / Questions:

Basil Larsen - Question to managers basic question - are we able to fish, how are things looking? We kinda want to use dipnets. Lots of people have dipnets but not many have 4" nets. Just wondering that.

Christy Gleason - We're at 195k fall chum. Once we get to the 300k line if we're over that's when we open fishing. I know people are hurting because they don't have 4" gear nets. We're near the 3rd quarter point of the run. Pilot Station fall chum and coho - not sure if it'll be enough to get to the 300k line but we're watching closely.

Basil Larsen- Our food chain is getting rattled more than we think. Usually we see twenty to thirty moose but we only see flooded out land. Scaring trappers. All lynx, martin, smaller critters that live at the South side of the Yukon. Big thing is moose. Houses double their moose intake. Russian Mission is a hotspot for moose. People get punk and moose. Looking slim out there. Competing for moose with bears and wolves then for them to get wiped out from the flood.

Bill Alstrom - Add on and reiterate what Basil is talking about the moose population. Had high water over the banks on the Yukon. Might be a factor regarding our moose population. I think a lot of our cow-bearing probably got wiped out. I kinda agree with Basil. When we go out and take rides or something we come across a lot of moose but this year is kinda grim. Maybe I haven't been out enough. Moose population, the dept of Fish & Game did counts recently and see significant drop in moose counts?

David Walker - I'm pretty young, 63 years old. Seeing changes, high water. Nature will balance itself out. We've been conservative with the moose. They're not dumb. Probably moving up to high country. I was watching a documentary about the Columbia river in 60's. Natives cut off, treaties broken. Told not to fish when commercial boats were fishing in Puget Sound. Praying this is not happening with us up here in Alaska. Praying it's not history repeating itself. In the future, not much people on this Teleconference. Getting stale, we can't fish. In the future there has to be some kind of give. We don't eat fish like we used to. I can feel it in my health.