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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 13th 2023 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, August 29th, 2023. Call lasted 65 minutes. 42 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:

Political Representatives participating:

Communities participating:

Russian Mission

St. Mary's

Marshall

Alakanuk

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 250,000 fall chum salmon in the river as of August 28, compared to the median of 743,000 fish, for this date. Genetic mixed stock analysis on chum salmon that passed the mainstem sonar from August 14–20 are on the way to the lab. The results will be reported in next week's Advisory Announcement Fall Update #7. The previous group, from August 1–13, indicated fall chum salmon were 85% U.S.-origin and 15% Canada-origin stocks. On average more than 95% of the fish are fall chum salmon for the remainder of the run. The cumulative CPUE for LYTF is below average and for MVTF is above average. We are past the typical three-quarter point for fall chum salmon at both projects. These two projects are important for collecting the age, sex, and length

data for chum and coho salmon. The age composition of 408 chum salmon sampled from the LYTF project through August 20, consisted of 78% age-4 and 18% age-5 fish, which compared to the historical averages of 66% age-4 and 31% age-5. The percentage of female chum salmon through August 28 was 52%, which is below the historical average of 58%. 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. 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 to date has a cumulative passage of 9,900 fall chum salmon, which is below the median passage of 27,000 fish. The first-quarter point for fall chum salmon typically occurs on September 5 at this project. The Teedriinjik escapement goal range is 85,000–234,000 fall chum salmon. The sonar project on the Sheenjek River began operations on August 6 and has a cumulative passage of 1,073 fall chum salmon, which is below the median passage of 6,500 fish. The first-quarter point for fall chum salmon typically occurs on September 7 at this project. The Eagle sonar, operated on the mainstem Yukon near the U.S./Canada border, transitioned to counting fall chum salmon on August 28. The first day was estimated to be 123 fall chum salmon, which is below the median passage for this date is 2,900 fish. The mainstem Yukon River sonar operated near Pilot Station has a cumulative passage of 29,000 coho salmon, which is well below the median of 145,000 fish. The three-quarter point of coho salmon passage is typically August 31 at this site. The sonar, LYTF and MVTF are all showing late and weakness in coho salmon passage to date. We will continue to assess the run in the lower river into the first week of September at Pilot Station, LYTF through September 10 and MVTF through September 12 to see if there are any late showings of either fall chum or coho salmon pulses.

Andy Pedia, Subsistence Salmon - Remind folks we will be conducting subsistence surveys starting next week in Emmonak. In person instead of over the phone.

Christy Gleason - Yukon River Fall Season Manager - Unfortunately, this year the fall chum and coho runs are very poor and there's not enough fish to allow for full subsistence fishing. We are unlikely to meet fall chum salmon escapement goals and the treaty objectives with Canada. The coho run is trending to be the second lowest on record, so we may see further restrictions to the subsistence live-release gears that are currently allowed. Fall chum fishing is expected to remain closed. To end the fall season, you can expect larger mesh gillnets restrictions to be relaxed in early October in the Lower Yukon, similar to the last 2 years. We will roll this date upriver to other districts based on the fall chum migration timing. We'll keep important spawning tributaries closed to further protect salmon, similar to the last few years. We really appreciate everyone's cooperation with salmon conservation along the Yukon River during a fourth year in row of poor fall chum and coho salmon runs. We recognize these fishing closures are very difficult for families living along the Yukon River. We are seeing small improvements to the fall chum run size, with this year being slightly stronger than the last 3 years. If you have any questions this fall or winter, you can call me at the Fairbanks office at 907-459-7274.

Holly Carroll Yukon River Subsistence Fishery Manager, USFWS - Taking feedback and phone number will be open. 9073513029.

Jacklyn Kendall, Fishery Manager, Yukon River - Stock Assessment: DFO technicians are still present at the Eagle sonar locations in Alaska, where collaborative efforts with ADF&G are occurring for sonar operations and test fishing. Monitoring there for fall chum salmon has begun.

Our technicians evacuated the Porcupine Sonar camp near the community of Old Crow on August 9 due to nearby wildfires. The evacuation was rescinded and our crew is back in the camp, however, data is only current to August 8 at the moment for Chinook salmon where the count was 450 fish. This compared to 349 on that date late year and the project average of 2,741. Sonars are now fully functional as of August 20th following the evacuation, and we have begun to monitor fall chum with 390 as of August 28th. This compared to around last year at this time of 813 and 2,682 being the project average. Our crews are now at the Fishing Branch River setting up the camp, which includes the weir and sonar, to begin the fall chum enumeration. Sonar is expected to be operational this week. The Klondike River sonar, managed by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in in Dawson City has an 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 23 estimated count is 1,835 Chinook salmon have passed the sonars, compared with 4,903 around this date in 2021. This stands in contrast to the average count of 6,982 for the project spanning the years 2016 to 2021. The operation of the Big Salmon River sonar commenced on July 14th. As of August 26th there is an estimated 1,741 Chinook salmon passed the sonar, compared with 1,945 around that date in 2021 and the 10-year average of 4,717. 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 69 Chinook as of August 26, compared with 128 on that date last year and the 10-year average of 806. 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 and levels drop accordingly. This will be more favorable as salmon migrations and spawning continue. 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, current passage estimates and results from genetics have provided a more accurate in-season forecast of Canadian-origin fish and we are now in alignment with pre-season forecasts of less than 300,000 drainage wide which will not meet Canadian spawning escapement goals nor provide for harvest opportunities. We will continue to monitor the run very closely, 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 - I have limited connection but wanted to send in an update for the last teleconference call. I am at Brooks Brook (Teslin Lake) meeting with FNs and the land use planning commission. Sorry I couldn't phone in. I am hearing about a few chum closures but not all communities get chum salmon. There are no chum in the Whitehorse area. Most First Nations rely upon Chinook. Kids are back in school and we are having unseasonably warm weather. It was warm 27C and dark out. I don't think I can remember that ever happening in my life. I also went swimming yesterday in a lake that should not feel so warm. Water temperatures are still warm. Hopefully it will start to cool off soon and we will get

our fall weather. I wish everyone a good fall and I look forward to seeing some of you at the upcoming winter meetings. I am hoping for some good news for next year. Take care, Elizabeth.

Community level reports:

District Y6abc:

District Y5abc&d:

District Y4a,b,c:

District Y3:

Russian Mission: Basil Larsen - Today is my parent's anniversary. Happy anniversary to them. We have had two to three sunny days this month. Realizing this is the end of August. The water has been dropping steadily. For three days now, it is not dropping as fast so we know there is some fish out there holding the water steady. But no one has been out fishing because everyone is berry picking. School started and the kids are out doing subsistence activities. Fifty to sixty kids are out berry picking with boat captains. The boat captains caught a brown bear because it was too close to the kids picking berries. There are getting to be more and more brown bears these last few years. No one is fishing except setting a whitefish net while you go fishing. [what did they catch? pike] The blue berries are getting ripe. Not much left. Looking for raspberries but not many. Berries growing in new places. Switching into birds, geese, grouping up. Kids are going out and hunting. Geese aren't as fat as people prefer. Still go after them because of conservative efforts on salmon. Naturally we harvest all the other subsistence species and maximize everything. People are looking for moose. Couple went moose hunting, but weren't successful. Slim pickings. Lots of bears. Bird hunting and more bear tracks when they are out. When moose eat or stake a claim on an island, all the willows will be mowed down. Willows will grow tall when there are no moose there. Different vegetation growing. Thick bladed green grass that grows in ponds on the islands that flooded. My cousin went to Mountain Village, he is moving. Went down to Pilot Station to meet him. Got gifted a seal, shared it with us. We are cooking it right now on the grill. No-seeums and gnats are here, mosquitos. Behind my parents, there was a pond where there is usually no water. North bank and whole south side of the river in any ditch there would be water. Behind my fish camp there was a creek that we drive through but we've been having to drive around but the land sucked up the water. I saw some activity in an area and it was a bunch of dead fish - lush - live ones too. My son walked to one area of the pond and scooped them up. They are all going to die from the water disappearing. I know there is a lot of that going on, especially after the flood. We've been back to NE wind. Runway guys are just about done with their project. Starting to get bigger planes.

District Y2:

St. Mary's: Matty Beans - The water temp is 51 degrees today, kinda cool. No one is fishing down here. Everyone is berry picking. Lots of geese at 10 miles, that's where they are.

Bill Alstrom - Nothing to add, Basil in Russian Mission said it all, good report. Took a ride out a couple times. Looking for moose, seen a couple. Small. Could have been from the floodwaters this spring. Not much fat on them at all. Need more fat. Receiving gravel from upriver on the margins. Docking at the city dock and leave the props running, gravel spun. Andreafsky river swirling. Everytime they dock there's prop wash. Murky. Wonder if it affects the fish. Fish are done running. Wonder if anyone is subsistence fishing, people are focussed on berries and birds.

Marshall: Diane Fitka - Nobody been fishing here, people go out picking, people put out a net for whitefish. Trying to stock up on other fish besides salmon. Nothing really new to report.

District Y1:

Alakanuk: Max- Nobody has been fishing that I hear. People checking for blues. Having storms come through. That's about it.

Kotlik: Marvin Okitkin - I am traveling this week I cannot call in helping give a presentation on Inuit food sovereignty. Low water levels, 54° water temp. No one fishing except for a few Bering Cisco being caught when people go out berry picking. Still salmon fishing up the river a few coho bycatch.

BBAYK:

GaleVick - Pretty intense at AYK group - lots of board of fish work session and comment periods due coming up. Reconsidering an out of session Area M meeting with BOF. Fisheries meeting subcommittee meeting every month. Discussion will include all on the Yukon. Watching a lot of the activity on the Alaska Salmon Task Force. Several other commentary periods, a busy winter. Thanks for your work.

Open Discussion / Questions:

Jude Hensler - For Gale, several weeks ago you asked about an action plan. Did you ever find one?

Gale Vick - I found that information, not a chance to look at it yet. Will during the AYK group.

Bill Alstrom - Question about the turbulent water down to the mouth. Usually there is clear water. I don't know about salmon coming up the river. East Andreafsky fish weir. Wondering if a biologist can answer my question. It is a turbulent river from the St. Mary's dock down to the mouth and that is about three miles. It looks like the Yukon River. There is a gravel bar creating the turbulence. I know the Yukon is really silty. As soon as they hit that north Andreafsky, it becomes silt laden water. Do you think that confuses the salmon?

Holly Carroll - Not sure, don't think excessive prop wash would be enough to confuse the fish? We did have the weir running this year but only for part of the season because of high water.

Bill Alstrom - Reason I ask is because salmon in the river are small numbers. Thank you.

Basil Larsen - How long will the sonar be operating? How long will the Pilot Station test fishery be operating? How long at Eagle?

Unknown - Pilot Station sonar operates through September 8, Mountain Village test fishery will operate through September 12, and Eagle through October 8.

Basil Larsen - What will happen after that? No restrictions?

Christy Gleason - Our run is below our escapement goals so it will be closed until early October then we will relax gillnet restrictions with migration timing of chum.

David Walker - Notice water is murky? Over here. Christy said there would be further restrictions on us. With due respect that seems like a final blow to our way of life, feeding our dogs, final blow. There's no point to restrict us more than we already have been. Thanks and have a good year.

Christy Gleason - We were planning to leave the coho fishing open. Unfortunately the coho run is the second lowest on record. Only gear open for coho is dip nets and reels. We understand that people are probably not even using this gear but we have to protect them so that there are enough to spawn. Sorry that this is a bad year for both coho and chum and we are hoping that they will increase in future years.

Basil Larsen - How well does this information, us trying to survive, get out to deep sea fishermen? Like David said it's like salt on the wound, we bend over backwards. How well does this information spread in the upper chain of command?

Christy Gleason - With poor years of salmon runs on the Yukon River, everyone in the state of Alaska is pretty aware that Yukon River fishers are hurting by these closures. It is not taken lightly at all. Everything is taking a hit, Chinook Fall chum coho. I know that many of you have testified at the Board of Fish. I think everyone is aware and everyone wants these fish runs to rebound so that you can get back to fishing.

Holly Carroll - I'd like to add to that, one field we contribute to at the NPFMC, we provide reports, post-season and pre-season reports. We are presenting at the October Council meeting about the total closures again.

Basil Larsen - Okay, thank you. Good to hear that this information is being spread. It sits poorly with us if we are not hearing harsh measures being implemented out there where the salmon spent 80 % of their lives. WE are seeing that this "in river" management is NOT doing the trick. We are doing our part and we just want to see other things happen too.

Shannon Erhart - NPFMC meeting first week in October 7. Anyone who wants to call in and testify, we will be sending out information about how to testify. The more the better. Anything counts and the need to hear our stories more. Encourage more people to call in or zoom in to their meeting in October.

Serena Fitka - I'd like to thank all those who participated in the teleconference calls all season, especially to the Yukon River Area Managers, biologists, and those who call in every week to provide community reports. We appreciate your time, your knowledge, and input throughout the season. We want to encourage everyone to continue to participate in Yukon River fisheries activities during the off-season. We hope to reconnect next season Here are some dates to keep in mind: Sept 5, Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council mtg. Virtual. October 2-3, 2023 YRDFA Annual Meeting in Anchorage at the Egan Center. NPFMC meeting will be held at the Hilton Downtown from October 2-10 EIRAC Oct. 4-5 in Arctic Village WIRAC 11-12 in Fairbanks YKRAC 10-12 in Anchorage BOF Work Session on ACRs, cycle organization, stocks of concern October 12-13 at the Egan Center. Comment Deadline is Sept. 27. Please visit our website at www.yukonsalmon.org or our social media platforms to keep up to date on activities on the river.