



YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 13th, 2020 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, August 11th, 2020. Call lasted 116 minutes. 69 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: Public radio in Fairbanks, KZPA Fort Yukon

Political Representatives participating: None

Communities participating this week: 13

Marshall
Russian Mission
Nulato
Hughes
Galena
Tanana
Fort Yukon
Eagle
Nenana
Old Crow
Dawson
Pelly
Whitehorse

Community level reports:

District 2-Coastal/Lower Yukon

Marshall:

Norma Evan - Hello from Marshall, This past week, no one fished. We have other subsistence activities in place, berry picking, and some families are getting ready for moose hunting. The water has been high and steady and there has been moderate debris in the river but not as much as in July. Also, we have cooler weather.

District 3-Coastal/Lower Yukon

Russian Mission:

Basil Larsen - Pretty much no fishing at all. There were a couple fly fishers out, my sister and her kids, and they gave us some humpies for dogs. The low numbers are starting to concern a lot of people. I have had a couple households tell me they're not gonna fish at all and try to get a moose to fill the freezer and focus on berries. The water is still pretty high and we've had pretty cold weather. There was a brown bear and a couple cubs on the side of the runway, they were passing through probably for fish and berries.

District 4a-Upper Yukon

Nulato:

Mickey Stickman - There has been no fishing in Nulato. No one has tried for Fall chum yet. The water is super high, probably the highest level this spring. People are almost done picking berries. One more rain and the berries will be over ripe.

Arnold Demoski - No one is fishing here. People were getting ready and then they shut us down. It is unfortunate that the run is too small. A lot of people are upset and calling in. Want to share that. Me, personally, I understand why we are being shut down.

Mickey Stickman - As far as COVID-19, no travel into the village. If people get permission, they have to have a negative test and still have to quarantine for a week. If they arrive here without a test result they have to quarantine for 2 weeks. In the next couple days, the Nulato task force will decide on further restrictions. Unless you leave for medical reasons, there are restrictions on coming home. A few tribal members are stuck in the next village or Fairbanks. In the next couple days they will decide if and when these people can come home. Otherwise it is a complete lockdown here in Nulato.

Koyukuk River

Hughes:

Hugh Bifelt - First time calling in. Update for up here, I've been in camp for about a month, when king salmon were running, done real good. Almost caught 100 king salmon in 20 days. No chum salmon running with the king salmon this year. The fish I did catch were healthy, but I haven't had a net in for a couple of weeks now. The water has been up and down here. Plan to do some seining later in September.

Districts 4b & c-Upper Yukon

Galena:

Howard - Very poor fishing here. I was out for 9 hours on 2 different occasions and only caught 2, one was very sick with a large pus sack. The water has been high and there has been moderate debris. It's a very sad situation here.

Fred - Fall chum, a good fall chum, that was it. The next opening I think was Saturday night for 15 hours and didn't get Nothing! Water was really high so I expected if there was any fish, they were further out and my net wasn't deep enough to get any. Everyone I talked to didn't get any either. We haven't got but a couple of fall chum for the last 3 weeks.

Districts 5a, b, c & d

Tanana/Rapids:

Stan Zurey - Water dropping now but still at a slightly high level. About 10 camps are still open in the Rapids area. People using 4" nets have seen no fall looking chum until yesterday when a fisherman caught 2 downriver of Rapids. Up until now only an occasional worn out summer chum is all that has been seen in the nets other than good numbers of whitefish. People fishing grayling in the local spawning streams have yet to report a single summer chum being seen in them. That is unusual. Needless to say it seems like a disaster fishing year to everyone. COVID-19 Protocols remain in place at the general store where masks are worn and outsiders wanting gas or supplies are asked to call the store first. Flights into Tanana require Tribal Council permission. A second gas station, Tanana Gas, conducts business outdoors.

Fort Yukon:

Andrew Firmin - We have been closed and there is no fishing activity. A lot of disappointed people. We were told we could fish for dog salmon and now we can't even do that. We are hoping to use 4" but can't even do that now. Water was high last week but has gone down now.

Holly - informed Andrew that on Monday they opened up with 4" for non-salmon.

Eagle:

Ruby - We are still closed. No fishing at all. Not even 4" nets for non salmon. We still have extremely high water. It is like chocolate milk, so thick with silt. One fisher, just back from the bush for 3 weeks. I ate a handful of berries (cranberries). I appreciate pulse protections for kings. An interesting observation- I see a strange orange substance floating on the river - maybe algae or spruce pollen? It's been around for 1.5 weeks, started first of August, gotten more concentrated in the eddies, and main channel. Huge swirling patches. upriver and 40 miles downriver. There is extreme bank erosion in the Eagle area, maybe due to high water. Huge sloughs some miles long, sliding into the river. Could be part of why the river is so thick and dirty.

Districts 6a, b & c

Nenana:

Victor Lord - Not too many people fishing here. Not much activity on the river besides hunters. The river is good. I'd like to make a short quick statement, I might have to hop off to go dig a grave, we lost an elder. I dwell on this stuff, the closure we had for kings. With the state of

Alaska, and no offense to Holly, the people that have to pay first are the native people on the river. I am concerned about power plants, and feel like Native people pay first.

Canada

Old Crow:

Stanley Nejealy Sr. - Situation is the same on Porcupine, water is up and down, and was still catching salmon last week. We are going to follow the rules of conservation with other first nations in the Yukon River systems. We are getting some good quality salmon this summer, very good quality. If that is the case, then there is a good chance that they will have a good productive spawning. We are going to cut back on our fishing and not fish on the Porcupine river. People are getting ready to harvest moose and caribou. There is a lot of fresh water fishing in the river. Their livers and everything else looks pretty good. The stocks are pretty healthy. Stay safe and healthy.

Dawson:

Natasha - Fish have pretty much passed by. Few fishing but not much harvest to date. Fishing was reported to be slow, and water levels are (inaudible)

Sebastian Jones - No report on fishing. We're all pretty upset over it. Looking forward to hearing from scientists.

Pelly:

Elizabeth MacDonald - Water is very high and there is difficulty fishing. Really rough conditions. People went out fishing but didn't catch many.

Whitehorse:

AI - It's been wet, and there aren't many salmon showing up. As of this morning the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee suggested to first nations to stop fishing due to low numbers.

Management Reports Agenda:

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist - It is that time of the season that we are switching to assessment project information. Based on the inseason projects the fall chum salmon projection is for a run size of less than 300,000 fish, which is the second lowest run size since the year 2000. Mixed stock analysis was applied to the passage estimates to remove summer chum salmon and resulted in an estimate of 81,000 fall chum salmon in the river as of August 11 (more on this when I cover the assessment projects). Fall chum salmon are typically dominated by age-4 fish however, the 2016 parent year that produced that age class has shown extremely poor survival in chum salmon runs throughout the state. Four small groups of chum salmon have entered the Yukon River since the transition to fall season representing 65K, 62K, 17K and we are still waiting for the fourth group that entered on August 8 to pass the mainstem Yukon River sonar. It typically takes fall chum salmon 39 days to travel from the mouth to the U.S./Canadian Border using 35 miles per day though expected to be a bit slower with this year's

high water. 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 salmon and coho salmon. The chum salmon age composition from the LYTF through July 31 consists of 38% age-4 and 59% age-5, this compares to the average of 59% age-4 and 40% age-5, which is practically reverse of normal. Females represent 49% of the fish sampled, which is below the average of 56%, as of August 10. The average length is 597 mm from a sample of 366 chum salmon, is above the 10-year (2010–2019) average of 583 mm. This larger body size is partly attributed to the larger age-5 component present in the run. The mainstem Yukon River sonar operated near Pilot Station as of August 10 has a cumulative count of 149,000 chum salmon which is below the median of 325,000 fish. The mid-point for fall chum salmon is typically on August 11 for this project. Genetic mixed stock analysis on chum salmon from July 19–August 2 that passed the mainstem sonar, contained approximately 55% summer chum and 45% fall chum salmon. The summer chum salmon stocks were primarily Lower River stocks at 67%, while the Middle River and Tanana stocks were below average. The fall chum salmon stocks in the entire sample consisted of 28% Border/US (Teedriinjik/Sheenjok/Black), 11% Canadian and 5% Tanana Fall stocks. For fall chum salmon this represents 75% U.S.-origin and 25% Canadian-origin stocks. Using mixed stock analysis, a preliminary estimate of 74,000 summer chum salmon have entered the river after July 19 through August 10 resulting in an estimate of 81,000 fall chum salmon inriver, as stated at the beginning. If you double this amount, for the mid-point of the run, this is an extremely poor return of chum salmon and is currently tracking with our lowest run on record that occurred in 2000. For coho salmon, as of August 10, the cumulative mainstem Yukon River sonar passage estimate is 6,100 fish, is below the median passage of approximately 12,500 fish for this date. The first quarter point for coho salmon is typically on August 16 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 about 42% of average which is better than their chum salmon that are only 21% of the average at the Bethel test fishery. That is all I have, Andy Padilla, the project leader for the post-season salmon harvest assessment is going to update communities on how the project will be conducted this year due to COVID.

Andy Padilla- ADF&G Post- Season Project Leader - We conduct subsistence salmon harvest surveys since before statehood. This year things are different with COVID-19 and we are NOT planning on coming to communities directly. We are coordinating with YRDFA to do mail surveys, phone surveys and try to contact ALL households since not everyone will be available by phone. We are also doing an online survey. We really hope that people start to use that. We won't be visiting in person but coordinating with YRDFA and trying to keep on schedule. We try to spend 3-4 days in each community. We will be coordinating with a YRDFA contact in the community. We will send out mail surveys just prior to when we would usually be in your community. Hope to announce via VHF. YRDFA assistance will be using masks, following CDC guidelines, not entering anyone's house, using hand sanitizer, etc. If you have any questions please contact 907-459-7294

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - Understatement of the century is that this has been a tough season this year. Very unexpected for folks coming into this season. The fall chum is coming in with two "pulses" and that projection is less than 300k fish. Not looking good

for fall chum. This is the regulations put in by the board of fish, which tells us how to manage fall chum. A threshold of 300k fall chum is needed for fishing. Since our projections are less than that, we have to close all fishing on the yukon drainage due to regulation. We also would not be able to achieve our escapement goals and objectives with Canada. As of Wednesday at 6pm all fishing on the main stem will be closed until further notice. There is a small section still under summer management until approximately next week, and after that we assume they will be closed. If there is a large pulse that comes in, we can make changes and we will continue to monitor it. We will also be exploring other options such as dip nets and manned fish wheels to see if we can get some opportunity to fish coho, which are in now, with requirements to live release the fall chum. We don't know if it will pan out, or how it will look, but we are considering it. Ruby you had a question about the orange thing you are seeing in your neck of the woods. Without seeing it, I can't say for sure, but without seeing it sounds like it's _____ (algae).

Fred West, Fishery Biologist Contact info for ADFG YR Summer Season Manager; call 907/267-2237

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Gerald Maschmann - Acting Yukon River Federal In-season Manager - Thanks Jeff and Bonnie and Andy. It's unfortunate and tough. These surveys are really important to managers, even more so this year. We really appreciate it if you are able to share.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Jesse Trerice - Fisheries Manager - Despite a canadian component of (...) the numbers that have been observed at Eagle which yesterday was 30k is concerning. DFO provides updates to first nations and we aren't likely to meet spawning escapement. As for fall chum they haven't made it to the border as of yet but the most recent projection is significantly low. Canada's harvest share is quite low. Working with that to identify harvest opportunities for Canada. Unfortunately due to operation challenges we won't be running the porcupine sonar this year but will run one at the fishing branch till late October. Eagle sonar as of yesterday counted around 29k, the run is nearly over at the border. The female count of chinook was around 52%. The pelly river sonar has counted 4k which is 69% of the average cumulative percentage. Whitehorse fish ladder has counted 8 chinook which is 4% of the average cumulative average. Wanted to extend my apologies to Victor and his community and the loss of their elder. And to the people not fishing I want to extend my regards, it has been a rough year and that is an understatement. I believe there is still hope.

Questions and discussion:

Sebastian Jones- Dawson - I've been fishing for chinook salmon on the yukon for quite a long time. I don't think the fish are getting smaller but I believe we have lost the large fish. The super large ones we lost first. So while it looks as though the average size is coming back smaller, in my mind the loss of the larger fish is done by selective fishing. There is very strong evidence that selective size fishing causes (...) While climate change and over abundance of hatchery fish makes life tougher it has a lot to do with size selective fishing. Did you take in traditional knowledge when doing this research?

Krista Oke- It seems to be the loss of larger fish that is driving this change. For the traditional knowledge, at the scale of this study, was pretty hard to obtain. The number of people we would have had to talk to would have been huge but I agree that it is important.

Mickey Stickman- Nulato - How many more thousand Fall Chum would have to pass the sonar or test fishery before they decide to have a fall chum opening on the river. I know it sounds like we are having a complete closure on fall chum, which is very sad because there are a lot of people who are actually waiting for fall chum, because they missed out on Chinook fishing. Then for guyse4ki3mnk in Y5 and Y6, man, it's got to be terrible for them to have zero fishing. There has to be some kind of fishery disaster declaration for the amount of subsistence food that's going to be missing off the Yukon River fisherman's plate.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - I hear you loud and clear about the impact that this fall chum run is going to have. I know people were looking forward to having this run to fish on. As far as what we would need to see for the number of fish: we've been waiting to see what the numbers are as they come in. We haven't seen anything that amounts to a really big pulse. We would have to see a pulse that would be big enough to bump our projection to greater than 300k fish. We cannot allow any fishing when our projections are less than 300k by regulation. If we do have a surplus and we can allow more fishing, I think it is really important to take a look at what we can do for everyone, but particularly for the people in the upper river. As far as the fishing disaster relief, your best bet is YRDFA or the Fish commission.

Victor Lord- Nenana - Thank you to Krista. She sounded very informed. She was right on all the values and the signs and how the King salmon is important. We all value the size of the King salmon. Thanks Mickey... disaster... I agree with him about that.

Virgil - I'd like to ask 2 questions about the size of fish Did you take a look at when they went to small mesh gear in SE and take a look at the Yukon where we still use small mesh gear. 2nd question pertaining to the odd/even pink salmon runs. People in Bristol Bay maybe 20 years ago, that indicated on the big pink salmon years the sockeye salmon came in about a pound lighter.

Krista Oke - Thanks to Victor and those observations about large Chinook. Then the questions - large gear types, we really wanted to look at that, esp to look at diff regions and to keep track of which gear types were being used. SE most data from troll fishery which makes it difficult to compare to gill net mesh size. Want to look at this in the future but will need to look at individual species. The even and odd year pink salmon. We did look at abundances of pink salmon in north pacific and those returning to AK. Abundance of pink impacts body size, esp for sockeye. But didn't always see a big impact for some species. Yes for sockeye that was important.

Arnold Demoski- Nulato - There are a lot of people who believe in conservation of king salmon, they did fish. They are going to suffer because they didn't fish for king salmon and now they cannot fish for fall chum.

Serena Fitka- YRDFA Director - To address Mickey's concern about disaster - I am working on a resolution declaring a fishing disaster. There is discussion and I am reaching out to others.
Stephanie - I will just follow that up - just a reminder to everyone, asking the Governor to declare a disaster on the Yukon, it would be for Commercial fisheries only. There is no process in place to have a declaration made for subsistence fishing. We are working on language to be in place for this in the future. I just want people to know should there be a declaration made for a disaster to be made it will only be for Commercial, and it will take years before anyone will see any money. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't pursue it, but I just want to be clear as to what it means. The fish commission and TCC are working on a way to support the hardest hit communities to make sure people have food over the winter. Hang tight. We are looking at other sources of money to help the communities in need.

Holly Carroll- ADF&G - There are also two forms of CARES act funding, some related to NOAA fisheries. Also a fund, once ADFG develops how to distribute those funds, there will be a process for fishermen to apply for state related CARES act funding. We will put up a Facebook post about how to receive funding.

George- Anchorage - Can you explain the part where fish and game is developing that plan?
Holly - I am actually developing guidance right now to clearly relay the information to fishers. So I don't really want to get into it now. There will be a CARES act program that we will be administering. It will be distributed based on a spending plan, and that plan is under development. What I did was I went to a link that was sent to us that we can read about the money and sign up for emails. I will be putting out a post once I have all the links in place. YOU can look for that tomorrow on our ADFG Fishing page.

Ruby - Eagle - My heart goes out to everyone, all along this river, we are all experiencing this in different ways. I want to thank the managers, we know that your job is hard, even when it is a difficult decision, it is the right one. Eagle Sonar, any thought to extend their season due to major catastrophe with the Fall chum this year.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager- defer to Bonnie

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist - Carl on the line? Program goes until Oct 6.

Carl - issue with running Eagle late. Equipment comes in by road and if we push it too late, we run the possibility of not being able to drive our trucks back.

Kathleen- Tanana - I am wondering, what was the total number of King salmon that went through Pilot sonar?

Holly Carroll- ADF&G - 160,000 Chinook - including canadian stock.

Kathleen the fall chum is 81k?

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist - Yes.

Kathleen- Tanana - I haven't, I missed a lot of the teleconference - I would like to reiterate that everyone that could not fish on chinook have been waiting for the fall chum. I am hoping that there are more that are coming into the river so that we can give the fisherman a little time to fish on it. Food prices have gone up sky high. Caribou season is open, and people are gathering as much as they can. We caught.... There has been a lot of ick in the salmon also. We are

thankful for the things we did get. I cut my season a bit too thinking I would be able to fish on the fall chum. It is serious. The COVID-19 support deadline for fishermen passed last Friday. We were interested in it.

Sebastian Jones- Dawson - I note that in parts of the river, 4" nets are allowed or are going to be allowed. Rationale is so that non-salmon species can be taken. How many chum salmon do you expect will be caught in a 4" net?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - To be honest, I do not know how many fall chum will be harvested using 4" mesh. Intent of the gear is for people to go out and harvest non-salmon. We ask them to target areas that are not known for salmon. obviously that can happen. If we get reports of that, we might have to consider.... If you are using it to target non-salmon species, you might catch a fall chum or two. If you are catching a lot of chum salmon, you should move. If we get reports that people are using it to catch fall chum, we will have to change that gear.

Kathleen- Tanana - We didn't catch summer chum. It was pretty old looking summer chum. Sebastian - I didn't mean to target your questions (Katheleen) I am a fisherman and I know how to catch fish. If I wanted to target fall chum with a 4" I could. If we really want to protect fall chum, we should use other gear types using selective fishing such as dip nets, beach seines etc.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager -Thanks for that. We will take your comments under consideration. But considering the hardships people are under, it is prudent to give people all the opportunity to fish on non-salmon species that we can.

Martin - I have a question for Krista, Does a dominating species like summer chum take over the nutrients that are needed for the other species?

Krista Oke - I think that is a really good question. When we looked at competition, we were mainly thinking about competition in the ocean. It's a resource, there is a finite amount of and there is just not that much to go around. It is not something we focused on for this. Body size, fish were coming back younger. We were really interested in whether there was something going on in the ocean.