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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 3rd 2023 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, June 20, 2023. Call lasted 75 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 present: Max Graham, Grist Magazine
KZPA, Fort Yukon

Political Representatives participating: None

Communities participating:

Alakanuk
Mountain Village
St. Mary's
Russian Mission
Ruby
Tanana/Rapids
Beaver
Nenana
Fairbanks
Whitehorse
BBAYK
Area M

Management Reports:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Fred West -ADFG Summer Season Research Biologist - in Bethel, AK

Assessment update: 1st pulse of chinook passing sonar. Total remains below average. Summer numbers are below average for Lower Yukon Test Fishery. Drifting since June 5th experiencing high water issues and lots of debris causing canceled trips. Both species are below average. They are seeing summer chum. Pilot Station sonar began June 6. High water levels. Some debris. Sonar and test operations are proceeding as planned. 11,114 +/- 6k fish; below average. chum: up to 60; + 6K below avg as well (for this date). Seeing a strong push of summer chum. Big catches

lasting a couple days. Crew is on site. Anvik has been counting since the 15th. The run is below average. Klondike River weir: dealing with high water, not installing weir yet. One new project: a radio project was put in the water yesterday. Hoping to tag 500 chinook over the next 5 years. Tagged with internal and external tags. More information - they provided posters around the river, and in the office in Emmonak. If you encounter a tagged fish, please call 1-877-467-2104 and share information of where/when you caught the fish. As a “thank you”, you will be entered into the salmon tag lottery. Contacts are: Chuck (907)267-2217 or Fred West (907)267-233. Age composition report- wasn't sure about heat stress in 2019. Saw a substantial number of 4 year olds over 50%.

Deena Jallen, Emmonak, ADFG Summer Season Manager of Yukon River-

Working in Fairbanks. Not much to update. Preseason strategy the same - closures. Closures have been announced. Experiencing connectivity issues. Watching runs as they come in; they are similar to 2022. One of the lowest runs ever seen. Subsistence may remain closed to allow fish to get to spawning grounds. Too early to know the summer chum run. If above 500k - they'll address how to open/etc.

Holly Carroll, US Fish and Wildlife Service Yukon River Area Manager

Nothing to add. Comprehensive from ADF&G. Standing by to answer questions if they arise.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Adam O'Dell - Biologist from Whitehorse. Have techs heading to Eagle to set up camp and start in July. Another project at Porcupine River to set up camp as well. Hoping to have towers up to detect Chinook. Porcupine will have a tower. Things are looking normal in comparison to past years. High water at the Klondike River. Old Crow experienced a rapid, fast melt in spring.

Jaclyn Kendall, Fishery Manager, Yukon River

Jaclyn Kendall: Dept fish. Canada. 2023 will be finalized by the end of June. Key priority remains focused -for the salmon reaching salmon spawning grounds for future returns. Still cautious/conservative. Fishing is not expected.

Rachel Kangas, YRDFFA Project Manager - Main focus is the traditional knowledge interviews. Technicians will interview fishermen along the Yukon from (7) areas they chose and gather traditional knowledge regarding fishing. This has not been done before. They are gathering knowledge from elders to build a database to see what was traditionally & culturally in their areas - where they used to fish but not anymore.

Heather Hanson, USFWS Fish Passage Engineer - wanted to share that they've been working together w/YRDFFA. They visited (7) communities. They hear concerns of people along the river, see the freshwater habitat, and gain understanding of habitat degradation. They will incorporate concerns into WEAP. It's great to get feedback. Will compile and share information with partners. Hoping the information will help inform where action should occur for spawning salmon. Starting to collect data this year and continue next year. Working with interviewing fishermen along rivers.

Community level reports:

District Y1:

Alakanuk: Max Agayar - salmon surveyor. caught sheefish, whitefish, 1 jack chum, in set nets. Heard on the VHF that someone is headed to the ocean for halibut fishing.

District Y2:

Mt. Village: Nita Stevens -: spoke with (6) fishers. They caught whitefish, pike ,and sheefish. Water is still high but dropping. Not lots of drift in the river. Wondering and waiting to see when subsistence fishing is opening. Water level is still high but slowly dropping; some drift in the river. People are waiting to see if subsistence opens but are not sure yet.

St. Mary's: Erik Weingarh - water is high. Some fishermen are fishing with 4" gear. Not a lot of whitefish or sheefish, but it is spring. Concerned about not getting reports from coastal communities. Want to see reports from down river. Gas is expensive.

Bill Alstrom - not much to add to Erik's report. Been out on Yukon a couple times. Water still high. Quite a bit of drift in the river. People are catching whitefish, sheefish, and pike fish with 4" gear. Water is slowly receding.

Matt - temp at Forks is 55.1 degrees. Water dropping. Folks using 4" nets. Seeing more Fish & Game planes than mosquitoes.

George - point out that there is more Fish & Game activity; planes flying around. Hasn't been out fishing because gas is too expensive.

District Y3:

Russian Mission: Basil Larsen - Finally got some nice weather. Wanting to get logs. Water dropping. Drift showing up. Pulling out islands. Everywhere you go there is lots of water. No salmon caught. There are nets out catching fish to pass out (share) with the community. Fishcamp clean up activities occurring as the flood left "ugly mud" and it is taking a while to dry out. Residents are voicing concerns about this. During interviews he heard lots of chatter about a barge that passed through the village leaving a stench of oil (fuel). Local concerns regarding the fact that the community has been relying on moose as a substitute for no salmon. The flood was a carnage to renewable resources and is concerning people. Residents are relying on sheefish, whitefish, and pike fish for sustenance. Russian Mission would like to express concerns about what's happening in Marshall. Russian Mission is sending hopes and prayers to their neighboring community.

District Y4a&c:

Ruby: Rachel Kangas - water has been lowering. Not as high. Dropping at a good rate each day. No drift in the river. No one out fishing. Did go out for one evening. Was unsuccessful. No one is going out due to the high price of gas. Concerns about going out and not being successful combined with the cost of gas makes it not worth it.

District Y5abc&d:

Beaver: Rhonda Pitka - no one fishing. Some people do have hook and line for pike fishing but no whitefish nets.

Tanana/Rapids: Stan Zuray - Water levels are high. Not much drift. (2) camps occupied and moved into and (3) more camps in the process. Whitefish net outside of the village. Not much going on.

District Y6ab&c:

Nenana: Victor Lord- hung a net the other day. Waiting on the motor. River is low. People trying to catch whitefish but haven't caught up with them. Weather (temp) cooled off. Coastal camp (Eva Burk @ Culture Camp). Interesting. Not sure what's going on with water. If the weather gets warm the water level will probably come back up

Larry - haven't been able to get out yet, still working on the boat.

Fairbanks: Virgil Umphenhour - water level is going down a bit the past few days.

CANADA

Elizabeth McDonald, Council of Yukon First Nations - water levels are good, the river is a very clear color. No salmon. No fishing. None for years. No anticipation of fishing. Taking water samples for juvenile habitat, water temp recording. Have a First Nations meeting. Lots of people are attending a gathering for the death of an elder. First Nations say there are longer closures and nothing different coming up. They are voluntary closures.

OTHER UPDATE:

Mike Wood - new Board of Fish Board member. Live in talkeetna. 1 of 4 new members. Listening today to understand what is happening on the Yukon. Educating himself on Yukon-Kuskokwim area.

AREA M:

Matt Keyse, USFWS Branch Lead - Fisheries - brief update. Commercial fishing began June 15 6am - June 18th for set and drift. Schedule remains the same for setnet. (2) gear types began today. Currently the 2nd period in Shumigan. Hours were reduced. Additional 50% reduction on fishing time. Part of management for conserving Chignik sockeye. Shumigan currently fishes for 44 hours now. Seine - began 8am and lasts 88 hours. Can't go into detail. Voluntary closures in the area. Current harvest is below average.

BBAYK:

Karen Gillis, BSFA Executive Director - reporting for BBAYK coalition - still maintaining Thursday morning 10am call - for Chignik/Nelson Lagoon. Focusing on bycatch and salmon distribution. Shares Fish & Game announcements. Shares legislative information and community based information. Lets people know if they want to participate in the call (must be a resident of the area) to call (907) 887-1148 or email her at karen@bsfaak.org. A Salmon Task Force was formed by Gov. Dunleavy, which is a law/act passed to establish an Alaskan salmon task force in hopes of getting more salmon returning. There have been recent announcements that members have been selected and appointed. Nominations happened in February. The Salmon Task Force is charged with developing a science plan to guide scientists and funding for salmon management. A subgroup will focus on AYK. If you are not appointed but want to participate, please reach out to her and she'll put you in touch with the person who is taking names for the subgroup. In response to Western Alaska communities (chum/chinook) salmon. Identifying knowledge gaps and finding ways to support salmon management. Will be discussing the Salmon Task Force during their teleconference.

Open Discussion / Questions:

Virgil - Asking Matt - I'm wondering if there was more than (1) person cited for throwing fish overboard?

Matt - I am a new person to the area. The person came in... not a resident (from Homer). Person was caught by a trooper throwing fish overboard. Drift gill net fleet not impacted by chum. Well below the 1st & 2nd trigger.

Virgil - is a 30 year fish process and fisherman... next year makes 40 years. Knows all regulations on it. Question about seiners - they have a vacuum hose to get the fish out, is anyone from the department that observes when the fish are sucked out to see what each species are?

Matt - no available personnel to send out on tenders. Concerns from the fleet themselves. Set a standard. They would weigh the fish - doing consistently the same. It is double checked at the processing plant. Thinks there is a lot of effort to do things better and accurately than in the past.

Billy Charles - Concern about cancellation of fish. Data collection not used anymore. Lack of participation with YRDFA? Cost of gas is a concern. Poorest communities in the United States. When indicators go away - measuring upper communities for subsistence harvest might be measured correctly. This is his concern. Hoping when they take away from an area... there are ways you can find a calm river. To go away from a consistent area on the river - there are other places you can go to get an indication from somewhere else other than areas they are testing. Can be another way of measuring.

Call ended [time]pm

2:15pm