



**YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION**

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**Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!**

Here is a summary of the 4th, 2020 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, June 9th, 2020. Call lasted 82 minutes. \_\_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:** KZPA, Fort Yukon 900AM

**Political Representatives participating:** None

**Communities participating: 19**

Alakanuk  
Mt. Village  
St. Marys  
Pilot Station  
Marshall  
Russian Mission  
Holy Cross  
Anvik  
Nulato  
Koyukuk  
Allakaket  
Galena  
Ruby  
Rapids  
Fort Yukon  
Venetie  
Nenana  
Fairbanks  
Dawson

## **Community level reports:**

### **Coastal District 1-Lower Yukon**

**Alakanuk: Pamela Cook** - There has been high river conditions, a lot of debris with too many sticks. About 17-20 kings caught here, things seem to be going slow.

**Allen Hanson** - I am camping out on Munson Island, and have been talking with Black River fishermen, the fishing is still slow. There is subsistence fishing at 2 pm! The NW winds have been gusting to 30 MPH.

### **District 2-Coastal/Lower Yukon**

**Mt. Village: Nita Stevens** - I've contacted 2 fishermen. There has been 1 chum and some kings caught with 7.5" nets. There has been high waters here.

**St. Marys: Bill Alstrom** - Nothing to report here. It's been a little cold out there. There have been a few fish out in the river, but not many. We have a subsistence opener tomorrow at 2pm. The last opener was restricted to 6", but it's still slow and we are waiting for the fish.

**Pilot Station: Martin Kelly** - No subsistence activity right now, the water levels have been slowly dropping. I'd like to express that it is important for managers to allow subsistence fishing with the small window of nice weather we have.

**Marshall: Norma Evan** - I have spoken with 10 families, 3 of them have fished. Reported some kings and chums. Everyone is getting ready for subsistence season. The water has been high, with little to no drift.

### **District 3-Coastal/Lower Yukon**

**Russian Mission: Basil Larsen** - I have contacted 10 households, 3 of them have fished. People are getting the camps ready. People have been using 7.5" nets. The water has been fluctuating, 6-8" up and down. A lot of people are having motor troubles. The tribe donated fuel to tribal members! I want management to do 7.5" openings because there is very little fishing activity. With COVID-19 a lot of people have been laid off (basic jobs only). There has been a death in town so I haven't been able to interview as many people do to it being a sensitive thing. That family has not fished since.

**Holy Cross: Alfred** - We've got high waters and a lot of debris floating down. Only a few people have been fishing. 4 salmon and a few sheefish have been caught so far. People are using 7.5" mesh.

### **District 4a-Upper Yukon**

**Anvik: Alberta Walker** - We've been having 1 or 2 people fishing and they've been catching 1 fish every other day. 1 king, some sheefish and whitefish. There has been high waters, not much else to report. I will start surveys this week.

**Nulato: Arnold** - The water is still high. I know some people mentioned that they were going to try fishing this week but I don't know if they did. The cotton is flying around, and that is a good sign that the fish are coming. We are still waiting.

**Mickey** - I went to Kaltag by plane. The water is high. There are mostly people fishing for whitefish. As far as travel, you can go to Nulato if you are tested and you have signed some paperwork.

**Koyukuk: Ben Jones** - I've got nothing to report. The water has raised 4.5' since last week. I don't have a new motor for my boat, so I don't really know what is going on.

#### Koyukuk River

**Allakaket: Pollock Simon, Sr.** - The water is still high, but I think it's starting to drop down. It has been warm here. Water raised by 4". Whitefish are in the slough.

#### Districts 4b & c-Upper Yukon

**Galena: Howard** - The water is stable, but the bank is full. Water is about 12 degrees celsius, and there is little debris.

**Ruby:** The water has been high, with no drift.

#### Districts 5a, b, c & d

**Rapids: Stan** - The water is high but continues to drop. 6 camps are opening up. There are fish nets for white fish. Forage nets have mostly 90% sheefish, which is pretty unusual. It's been pretty dry, and the fire danger is present. Air travel is restricted from Tanana to Fairbanks, you need to call the Tribal Council for approval.

**Fort Yukon: Andrew Firmin** - I don't have a lot to report. Water is high but it is going down. Real hot, dry, windy weather here. People are getting ready for fishing. Some rod and reel and some whitefish happening. I would like to hear from management on what the proposed fishing schedule is for district 5.

**Venetie:** The river is high and going into the Chandalar. There have been a few Graylings.

**Myra from Fairbanks** - The water has gone down. Some areas are really clear. No salmon but we do go grayling fishing.

#### Districts 6a, b & c

**Nenana: Victor** - It has been pretty quiet here. Some boats with nets and wheel building going on. No fish, but it is calm and sunny. Other than that things are pretty good!

**Fairbanks: Virgil** - Water has dropped on the Tanana right now.

#### Canada

**Dawson: Sebastian Jones** - We are a ways from fishing, but we are listening to see how things are going in Alaska.

### **Management Reports Agenda:**

**Holly Carroll - ADFG Summer Season Yukon Area Manager**

**Contact info: 907-267-2324**

\*Jeff Estensen with ADFG will give a fall report as the fall season will begin on July 15 /16 in the Y-1 lower river district

**Fred West (Summer Season Yukon Area Research Biologist)** - The run sizes are forecasted to be slightly smaller than the 2019 sizes. Assessment projects that we have going on are the lower river test fish and Summer Chum drift. These are Big Eddie sites due to COVID concerns. The first Chinook was caught on May 29th and some in the lower river on May 31st. The water level is really high, and there is some debris. We wanted to note that we are only fishing half a net for set net, for conservation concerns. The historical CPUE info won't be accurate. The other update is that we got 2 days at Pilot Station with full counts. Current count is 2000 for Chinook and just over 100 for Summer Chum. They are also dealing with high water and some debris. LYTF Test net CPUE 1.74.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - This morning our set net caught 6 Chinook and 0 Summer Chum and our drift caught 0. As everyone has said, the fish are just trickling in now. Our management strategy the last few years has been to reduce fishing before the first pulse arrives so that the first pulse is protected. We do that because we have no idea how well the run size relates to the forecast. Remember that the King run comes in over 4 weeks and we will be able to get our harvest up. I know that fishing is important to everyone especially with everything that is going on right now with COVID and all of the uncertainty. It seems like we are getting a lot more questions about gear than normal. I can't stress enough, come to us directly!

### **US Fish and Wildlife Service**

**Gerald Maschmann (Fish Biologist)**- Holly summed it up well. We are still waiting on fish.

### **Fisheries and Oceans Canada**

**Jesse**- We saw some pretty heavy rain and thunder and lightning in the Whitehorse area. No flooding was expected. 2020 management strategy is supposed to be finalized in late June. It will be based on the Yukon River Panel recommendations as well as input from others. The 2020 forecast predicts the Canadian return 59-89k, which is considered to be a weak run size compared to our average size of 150k.

### **Questions and discussion:**

**Q//Victor** - We talk about Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans but we haven't a clue as to what is going on. We used to get Bycatch reports, but we haven't gotten any recently. Who is out there managing the fish out there? We should have a report from someone like NOAA or someone. We have been doing our part, but I don't know what the effort is out in the ocean. That's just a concern of mine.

**Q// Sebastian Jones-** Last year 20k Chinook salmon disappeared before the Canadian border. What measures are being taken this year to monitor those fish between Pilot and the Canadian border?

**A// Holly Carroll (ADFG) -** Between Pilot and Eagle, there isn't anything, and there are not any new projects going in between those points. We don't really know what happened. We are going to take a conservative management approach, and try to meet the escapement goals. If we see really warm water we might be even more conservative and that is all we can do at this time.

**Discussion:**

**Victor -** A lot of kings come up the Tanana. And there is not a lot of counting here. Kantishna and other rivers face this issue too. There are stories of people who live up here.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)-** That is a good point. We do assess escapement from Tanana and Salcha, the funding however was cut for Salcha. We dabbled in main stem Tanana but it was determined that it was not valuable for management. We try to prioritize assessment.

**Victor -** maybe in the future we can get a study.

**Robert Albert (Koyukuk) -** I've been to one of your meetings before. I specifically asked a question about the sonar and how it reads and picks up the different fish that go by. No one could really answer my question. I put out another thing about putting another sonar 12 miles above our village in the most narrow part of the river.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG) -** At Pilot we have a test fishery. The techs count all the fish, then they use a bunch of mesh sizes over 2 different periods. They then use a model, and they figure out how many of each species (at least 10) go through each day. Finding the right location and the money to add sonars is difficult. We are fighting for the funding that we have. We feel that we can manage this fishery pretty well with these tools currently in place.

**Martin -** I have a couple of points I wanted clarification on. What size set net did you catch 6 Kings overnight?

**Holly Carroll (ADFG) -** The lower Yukon setnet is an 8 or 8.5"

**Martin -** The department has been being conservative and not including the middle mouth for counts.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG) -** It was about logistics with COVID and we decided not to open the Emmonak office due to it. We will likely be able to use the middle mouth for the fall season.

**Martin-** I was looking at Salmon that passed through Pilot Station that made it all the way up, and Kings are making it, I've seen it on Facebook. I just want to make sure that we can try to focus on why we are getting so many more Jack Kings in our river.

**Holly Carroll(ADFG)** - You raise a really great point about the size of the Kings and the 4 year olds. The bulk of the runs are dominated by 4 and 5 year olds, but it is predominantly 4 year olds. They are choosing to come back younger, and additionally, a little smaller. Because of that that is one of the reasons we are using a 6.5" net size. You are right, we've been in conservation mode for 2 King cycles, but we aren't seeing an increase in King numbers yet. The best we can do is meet our escapement goals, reduce our harvest and use mesh that doesn't harvest the oldest fish.

**Sebastian Jones-** I am quite startled to hear you say that ocean conditions are making the fish come back earlier and smaller. I thought it was pretty conclusive that catching the larger fish has genetically modified the fish to come back smaller.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - Yes. We used to have 9" gear on the river. And we learned that it has a selective effect. So we reduced our size to help with that. But the ocean effect is still happening in locations that do not have the large mesh net.

**Mickey** - I've been wondering the same thing. In Nulato we haven't seen any 7 or 8 year old fish.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)-** When we talk about 8 year olds, when we look at our historical data base, 8 year olds may or may not have existed in the Yukon. There were a couple of hundred on the river, but some people think that could have been an error. 20-30% of the run used to be 7 year olds and now we are seeing less than 10%. I hope it is true that you aren't seeing the big 7 year olds because we've been managing you to use smaller nets in order to catch less 7 year olds, which is what we want.

**Victor** - I'm glad there are still some 7 year olds. We should conserve them so maybe then they can come back. My Nephew Rondell Jimmie and I caught one once and we almost cried. We shared it, and everyone complimented us and asked where we got it, but it was from another river.