



**YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION**

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

Here is a summary of the 5th, 2020 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, June 16th, 2020. Call lasted 90 minutes. 71 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: 18**

Emmonak

Mt. Village

St. Marys

Marshall

Russian Mission

Anvik

Nulato

Huslia

Galena

Ruby

Rampart

Rapids

Fort Yukon

Eagle

Nenana

Fairbanks

Old Crow

Dawson

## **Community level reports:**

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

**Emmonak: Nic Tucker**- I am just getting on just to listen. I am on the Interim Board of YRDFA which started back in the 1990s. Not much to say, I don't have any current information from Fish and Game. I want to encourage everybody to sit and talk, no arguments.

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

**Mt. Village: Nita Stevens** - 6 households have fished and 3 have not fished. No one has reported, but it was roughly 8 chum and 5 kings per person. People want more than two 18 hour periods. The water is high with debris.

**St. Marys: Eric** - I am a Yukon River Panel member from St. Mary's. Fishing is slow here. We are using 6" gear. There has been drift in the water and temps came up this week. Fished 5.5 hours and caught 10 chum, and a handful of kings. It's been pretty slow. Normally we are close to done or done by this week, but it doesn't look like we will get that close this week. Sheefish are usually feeding on smolts and I do not see anything in their stomachs. Also, there has been no bird activity, which I find interesting.

**Bill Alstrom**- I agree with Eric. The water is high, and the fishing is really slow. There have been a few chums, but things are slow and just trickling in.

**Marshall: Norma Evan** - This week I spoke with 11 families, 7 have fished. Some families are still experiencing motor problems and rebuilding smokehouses. 4 reported better fishing than last week, 1 said it was worse. Others reported crowded fishing, some have reported that with the size of the salmon compared to the size of the mesh, the bigger king salmon fall off. All fishers are using 6" or smaller. No one is set netting. All fish were reported to be healthy. I haven't started fishing yet, but I hope to start next week. Water has been high and steady with little to no debris. Erosion noticed by fishermen on the north bank of the usual fishing spot on the Yukon.

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

**Russian Mission: Basil Larsen** - Good afternoon, we just had a thunderstorm all morning and it just cleared up. The water is high. The usual fishing spots that we use are under water and causing a lot of snags. There was a lot of fishing activity. People are getting about 1-2 fish a drift. Catching has been in the single digits. Some people went all out and fished the full 18 hrs and they got more fish. Food security is getting tougher here and people would like to see increased fishing time. People were catching 2-3 kings to each chum. The water level is steady. We were pretty smoked out for a couple of days West and North of here.

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

**Anvik: Ken** - I'm just listening in and I'd like to comment on what Eric said. I've been watching the river for the last week, and I've seen smaller Sheefish. It seems like they're a little late this

year, and I have seen lots of them. The birds and seagulls were feeding this morning while I was up there. Not much on the Kings. The water is really high with some debris.

**Nulato: Arnold** - Not much fishing going on around here. One person tried for a few hours and caught only 1 King. The water is just too high here, but it seems to be dropping slowly. The food security in the village is a concern, a lot of people are getting pretty hungry for fish. I agree with Basil, but if we could get a 7.5" opening before the fish get here, that would be good.

### **Koyukuk River**

**Huslia: Zoe**- The water is dropping slowly, but it's still high. 1 household has a 6" net out but hasn't caught anything yet.

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

**Galena: Susy** - I'm just here to listen, I was hoping someone else had called in from Galena. I just got back to town and haven't tried fishing yet but I was hoping to use a 7.5" opening. I don't think anyone is catching fish yet, the water is too high, but I heard someone got 2.

**Howard**- There are 5 fisherman, and only 3 caught some small Kings and Jacks. The water temp came up this morning and there's very little silt in water. People are using 7.5" mesh. No Chums have been caught yet.

**Ruby: Ed** - No one has been fishing, but maybe one or two people will go out this weekend with the opening and try with their 7.5" mesh.

**Rachael** - The water is still high, and the drift has picked up in the last 3 days. I went out fishing last night and got 1 Jack King. The Kings are so small right now. We could see them swimming right through the nets. With a 6" net, no other species were caught, which is rare, especially in the beginning. The water is really high, we are right on the beach. There were a few more people tonight but there are struggles with the high waters. Caught at least 15 drifts and 1 King, that's it.

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

**Rampart: Rosemary Wheil** - The water is high, one person is fishing and caught one fish. The water is high and there is a lot of drift.

**Rapids: Stan** - I want to report but the internet keeps cutting out. The water level is high, which is a concern for some fishermen. The river is almost drift free. About 8 families have opened camp and are actively preparing for fish camp. People are waiting for more numbers to show. There are lots of whitefish being caught for food and for the dogs. They had a 140 acre fire right above the Rapids, but it seems out now from rain the last 2 days. COVID-19 update - some people are traveling on the river from far and near, there will be more travelers soon. Travelers need to wear masks in Tanana at the Gas Station and Commercial Store. Those flying in will still need permission from the Tribal Council.

**Fort Yukon: Andrew Firmin** - The water levels are above normal for this time of year, and there is little debris. There's been lots of rod and reel fishing. Some folks are getting wheels ready to

turn next week. I will start surveying next week or so. Finally got rain, one big downpour. First one of the summer. Lots of fire activity.

**Eagle: Ruby** - No one is fishing here in Eagle yet. The fish are not here yet. Everyone is looking forward to getting their boats in the river. The river is really high, maybe the highest I have ever seen, but it has gone down a little and there is a little drift. A few thunderstorms with lightning, but very little rain. Usually the first week of July people put nets out. Most people are going to wait this year and see how things go.

#### **Districts 6a, b & c**

**Nenana: Victor** - The river is pretty average, looks good, not much drift. If there were fish in the river, people would be fishing. There are a couple of guys fishing. I haven't been able to talk to them but I have seen their nets in their boats. Thanks Eric from the Panel for participating.

**Fairbanks: Stephanie** - Not in Fairbanks but technically the Fish Commission is based in Fairbanks. The Fish Commission is working hard this summer doing a communication strategy with social media posts and educational videos. Also, hearing folks on the river asking for 7.5" opening. I want to remind everyone that we are still really, really early in the run. I'm watching the numbers and we are not there yet. You are not catching Kings because of the 6" gear, but because the fish are just not in the river yet. Remain patient, once larger groups of King salmon come into the river, I'm confident that folks will be able to get some fish. The Fish Commission is founded on conservation and we will be repeating this all summer.

#### **Canada**

**Old Crow: Stanley Julie** - The water level is good in Porcupine river. It has been raining the last few days, which is good for the river and good for the salmon. Hopefully we can do some fishing up here this summer. We are also having food security issues. We are an isolated community, only one on the Canadian side. There have been a couple of forest fires and the Firefighters are out. In consideration of how we will manage the run, we'll figure out once the numbers get here. We need to fish and conserve at the same time. Take care and be safe.

**Dawson: Sebastian Jones** - We have nothing to report here, we are still quite a ways from going fishing but following along with the news.

**AI** - No one is going to put any nets in the water just yet, but water in the Yukon is quite high still and there is still snow in the mountains. Yukon River at Carmacks is back in the bushes. Tribes are flooded too.

#### **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)** - Everyone got the update that came out this morning. Early trickles of Chinook are making their way up river. We have not seen the first pulse at LYTF or Pilot yet. But we should see early fish passing Rampart, the ones that entered the river in May. Once we see the first pulse we can tell you more about where the early fish are. Just a trickle so far. Normal run timing is June 19th. LYTF haven't detected any pulses yet, like at Pilot. Catches have been consistent but no pulse yet. Current is swift and there is some debris. Subsistence catches are not strong yet either. The Pilot Station Sonar water levels are high, but this doesn't seem to be impacting the sonar. Passage for Chinook through yesterday was 18,000 - below historical average of 35,000. 16,000 Chum below cumulative median of 100,000, but similar to this date last year. Chum's may be similar to last year. In sum, we are still waiting for the first pulse.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - We are still wondering what's going on. This will start to make me nervous soon, but I'm not yet. Looking Statewide, the Kuskokwim, Norton Sound and Bristol Bay have not seen their fish yet. I think something is going on in the ocean and fish are late coming home. To echo what Stephanie said, I know people are eager to get their smokehouses filled. The King season will be 4 weeks long, it always is. You will fill your smokehouse with salmon as you always do. I know there have been speculations and concerns but I'd like to ask fisherman to throw it out the window, because the 2018 fishing season is more of what we should expect. We are going to stay conservative which means half schedules with 6" mesh. Future openings will be great when there is fish. More reports from the coast would be great, and I'd like to hear from locals about the right winds. We're not sure when the fish are coming in but we need to be conservative till we know the run sizes, it's the safest way to manage the run. I want to remind fishermen that nearly every district, up to district 4, is on half schedule with 6" mesh. I'd like to comment on Rachael's report, thank you for being very detailed. When the Kings come in with the Jacks and Sheefish up front, it's good. It means the Kings are small and young. This run should be dominated by 5-6 year olds. The reports have been very helpful. Sub District 5a, 5b, and 5c don't change till June 3rd. If you have any more questions regarding gear please call the Fishing Hotline! If you would like to get our News Releases you can call 267-2385 for those.

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

**Gerald Maschmann (Fish Biologist)** - Thank you. I have nothing to add. We appreciate those subsistence fishermen reports, even water temps reports are important.

### **Fisheries and Oceans Canada**

**Jesse** - Thank you to Stan and Al. Nothing to add except that it is wet with lots of rain. 2020 Canadian Management Strategy is expected to be finalized in late June. The Canadian Minister has received the recommendations from the Salmon Subcommittee, and things will be based on YRP 2020 recommendations. A conservative approach will be required in 2020 to ensure sufficient numbers of salmon for future returns. There will be a selective harvest of smaller and younger Chinook Salmon. At this point, it's a bit too early to make predictions but we will rely on info from lower Yukon assessments, as always we will be conservative and cautious.

### **Questions and discussion:**

**Q//Arnold** - why the run so late?

**A//Holly Carroll ( ADFG)**- That is like asking God why is the run so late. The fish are going to do what the fish are going to do. We cannot actually say that the run is late. We have to wait for the whole run to come in and then we figure out at the midpoint. Both runs appear to be late and all the runs in nearby rivers are also late, I have no answer as to why. And it is a little early to be sure that they are late.

**Arnold** - Thank you, a lot of people are asking that question and I am just trying to answer them. I know why we are restricted.

**Eric Huntington - Galena** - I was looking at numbers, looks like the result of the 2013 run had a low escapement into Canada. Survivability of that run was low. Personally, I only fish for Kings when the run is good, like 2017 and 2019. Please consider a moratorium on King salmon because of the late run.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - I appreciate your comments. Great to hear that perspective. I want to throw out a minor correction. This run will be dominated by 5 and 6 year olds like 2015 and 2016. 2015 had a record escapement into Canada, with almost 30,000 extra fish. I am not worried about the 5 year old component. 2016 was a terrible year for subsistence, but we did meet escapement goals that year. It is premature to assume that this will be a terrible run. Sometimes it doesn't hold up that bad years produce bad runs and good years produce good runs.

**Q//Stanley- Old Crow** - I have a question for the representative from Galena. Is there less debris in the water?

**A//Eric** - Howard is probably at work but yes water is a lot clearer than usual in Galena

**Stanley** - We are fishing for freshwater fish, Whitefish, and we did not catch much. After spring runs off they usually come out of lakes but we do not have resources to go and check out the lakes. The freshwater or habitat people may be interested in that comment.

**Sebastian Jones** - I am startled to hear 2019 was great, as we didn't make escapement. Canadians did not get to fish, and thousands of fish disappeared in the river.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - Let me attempt to restate. We had the first subsistence harvest that met amounts necessary for subsistence for the first time in 10 years. What happened between Pilot and the border is still not understood. I think it could have been a heat event. Good run sizes allow meeting escapement goals and border passage. That was the first time that we have not met escapement goals at the border in a long time. We do not want to make false claims about age classes coming back. The run sizes of 2014 and 2015, were above 200,000 fish.

**Q//Bill** - I have a question for Holly. I have been up and down the coast and recently heard that the Kenai river got shut down. Something about habitat and fish escaping before spawning grounds?

**A// Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - I think you are asking, based on other runs coming into Kenai and other areas, should we be worried about years when there is too much escapement?

Sockeye runs in the millions. It affects Chum and Sockeye, but I'm not worried about that with Kings. We see a mixture of escapements, sometimes high, sometimes low. I think it's still too early to speculate this run

**Bill** - I heard there were problems with the sonar, can someone from the team explain?

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)**- We have near and off shore drifts. This year at the sonar they're catching real good samples. When we are looking first 50-60 meters we use video. Further out we use a split beam. There are still passage rates and we don't think we're missing fish. Passage at Pilot is 2,000 fish per day. We need to run the sonars side by side but we don't think there is a problem with the estimates

**Q//Eric- Galena**- Can you open up two 48 hour openings before next week?

**A//Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - The reason it doesn't work is that the Kings come at the same time. The harvest of Kings will increase when they become present. We limit King harvest with the Chum, unfortunately. If we take a little bit out of each run it'll make up for the uncertainty. If we do the two 48 hour openings the projections won't be as good. We'd rather provide tiny opportunities for each group of fish till we know for sure.

**Eric**- Could we consider 6" and 5" mesh for Fall harvest?

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)**- The Fall harvest is not restricted for subsistence and mesh as long as it's 7.5" or smaller.

**Q// Fred Huntington** - When does the sonar open up?

**A// Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - About July 1st, right before the fish get there.

**Fred Huntington** - Did I hear 18,000 Chinook passed through Pilot Station?

**Fred West (Summer Season Yukon Area Research Biologist)** - That is correct.

**Holly Carroll(ADFG)** - Counting all the stocks. The fish will peel off into the Koyukuk, Tanana, and Chena. The trickle will be smaller by the time they get up river.

**Fred Huntington**- They shut us off for drifting on Y-4 after July 14th.

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - Please call me after, I'm pretty sure you are able to drift in Y4. I don't think it ends during the King season.

**Fred Huntington** - It doesn't get cut off on July 14th anymore?

**Holly Carroll (ADFG)** - Yes, the state regulations changed to allow drifting.

**Gerald** - July 14th is the old Federal regulation, but we do not have that anymore.

**Victor**- I'd like to point out that since the run is late, we pay close attention to Holly and the fishermen. We appreciate your reports on the teleconference. It helps me and others understand what is going on. The teleconference is a good tool.

**Call ended at 2:30pm**

Contact info for ADFG YR Summer Season Manager; call 907/267-2324