



## YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

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

Here is a summary of the #6 2024 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, July 16, 2024. Call lasted 113 minutes. 86 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 a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife.

### **Political Representatives participating:**

Mike Wood, Alaska Board of Fisheries

### **Communities participating: 21**

### **Management Reports:**

#### **Alaska Department of Fish and Game**

#### **Bonnie Borba, Fall Season Research Biologist, Fairbanks, Alaska**

I'm going to provide the initial Fall Assessment. The Summer Chum salmon run size is similar to last year with a projection of 783,000 fish. This is slightly less than last year and well below the average run size of approximately 2 million Summer Chum salmon, based on the relationship between Summer and Fall Chum salmon run sizes. The preseason run size projection on July 9th was estimated to be 405,000 Fall Chum salmon, while the average Fall run size is over 950,000 fish. This week, the estimate has been slowly decreasing and the final estimate will be run on July 19. Then we switched to in season management. Lower River projects switched to Fall season beginning today, July 16 for Lower Yukon test fish. July 18 for our Mountain Village test fishery and July 19 for the mainstem Yukon River Sonar at Pilot Station. After July 18th, that last strata of the Summer will be sent into the genetics lab. The previous sample is in the lab now and the results should be available tomorrow. So once the Fall Chum salmon enter the river, we will provide stock assessment for the main components of three main Fall stock groups such as the (Teedriinjik/Sheenjek/Draanjik) that's Group One, The Canadian stocks, and thirdly, the Tanana Fall stocks. Escapement projects in the Upper Yukon portion of the drainage within Alaska will be assessed with sonars operated on the Teedriinjik and Sheenjek rivers starting around August 8, and Eagle's average transition date from Chinook to Fall Chum salmon monitoring is around August 19. We will be using these in river assessment monitoring projects to determine if the escapements will be achieved for the drainage wide goal as well as the goals on the Teedriinjik and the Canadian components, the Fishing Branch River and the Yukon River Mainstem and Eagle.

#### **Christy Gleason, Yukon Area Fall Season Manager, Fairbanks, Alaska**

As Bonnie mentioned, the Fall Chum projection is above the lower end of our drainage wide escapement goal of 300,000 to 600,000. With the majority of the fish right now in the early part of the Fall season being Summer Chum, we are allowing selective gear to continue in districts that have Summer Chum for the 1st 10 days of Fall season. This is exactly what we did last year, so we're hoping fishermen can get out and get some Summer Chum. You'll have to release all Chinook salmon from the selective gear. The Lower Yukon Districts are beginning to switch over to Fall Season Management. District 1 and the Coast switched over

today, July 16th. After the 1st 10 days of the Fall Season in the Districts that see Summer Chum fishing will close because we are unlikely to meet the two Canadian treaty objectives for Fall Chum. Once the true Fall Chum salmon arrives here at the end of July in the Lower Yukon. We'll be monitoring the Fall Chum run really closely with US Fish and Wildlife and we'll be making adjustments to the fishing schedule as needed. So that's my brief update for today to begin the Fall Season.

**Fred West, Summer Season Research Biologist, Bethel, Alaska**

I'll give a brief Summer Season Assessment update before Deena will provide Management Strategies. The end of the Summer Season, as of the 15th of July, an estimated 63,178 Chinook salmon have passed the sonar at Pilot. That's well below, we're not planning on meeting any kind of escapement objectives or anything in the run. The run appears to be with the midpoint around July 1st or 2nd, that's one of the later runs on record. We're estimating a run size of around 27,000 at the border, or at least Canadian-origin at the mouth of the river, with a range of 22 to 34,000. That's well below the objective needed of 71,000. For Summer Chum, we're currently at 733,000 passed the sonar. We'll transition to Fall season starting July 19th, the first day of Fall Season. We have a few more days of assessment of Fall and Summer Chum, but that run is also late with the midpoint of around the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, which is not the latest, but it's late. I think last year it was the 5th of July and there have been runs that have been late as the 6th of July but there's still some fish to come. We got the LYTF (Lower Yukon Test Fishery) that they've missed a couple of drifts over the weekend because of poor weather. Some of the estimates of the index that we got, may not represent the full passes that's expected at Pilot over the next couple of days for Chums, but that project, as Bonnie mentioned, started assessing for Fall Chum with 6 inch gillnets starting today. Pilot Station, the Count Pass Pilot for Chinook is  $63,178 \pm 14,000$ , that's well below the cumulative average run timings for all years, 155,000 and late years of 129,000. Well below average, but a little bit better than the last couple of years. For Summer Chum, we're at  $733,361 \pm 39,000$ , that's well below the normal all time all year average of 1.5 million. Also below the late year average or median of 950,000. It's maybe not quite as similar to run size to last year, but maybe not quite as good but still above or within the escapement goal. The project that we're concluding is the Radio Telemetry Project, the tagging in the Lower River in Emmonak concluded on the 12th of July. They were able to deploy over 180 tags and they are continuing to track fish using the remote tracking towers and aerial surveys within both Alaska and Canada. They'll be continuing to track fish as they move upriver. For the Andreafski Weir, lots of high water issues again for some of these tributary projects. That project, the water rose over the weekend, so the weir is no longer fish tight but they're still able to observe a few fish passing the fish trap, so there's fish in the river, so the counts would be considered a minimum, but they've only seen 22 Chinook Salmon and they've seen 173 Chum salmon through yesterday. For the Anvik, similar situation they had to remove the sonar midday the 14th of July. The count through the 14<sup>th</sup> was 75,771, which is below the median of 324,000, below average. Hopefully won't be out of the water as long as last year, currently they're not counting. For the Chena River, they've been out about over a week. They've been out of the water because of high water. They aren't able to visually count or use the sonar to count. Their last count was 14 Chinook and 12 Summer Chum back about a week ago. For the Salcha, they were able to count after using sonar for the last week, but then just over the weekend they had to pull the sonar, but they're back in the water. They missed less counts than the Chena, they were up to 88 Chinook and 68 Summer Chum, both counts are below average. For the Eagle sonar, they're up to 1,707 Chinook Salmon, which is well below the average of 7,886 for this date. The counts are a little bit stronger than the last couple of years, but at this time that's definitely well below average. We have the next batch of genetics analyzed for Chinook at Pilot. Those are for the samples between the 24th June and July 8<sup>th</sup>, that was 42% Canadian-origin and that's really similar to historical genetic composition for this time of year, the middle part of the run. That's as expected, and the rest of the samples will be analyzed post season and there's the next round of genetics for Chum are currently in the lab, the results should be available by tomorrow. There's no new age composition data available yet, but hopefully they might be updated in the next update.

## **Deena Jallen, Summer Season Manager of Yukon River, Emmonak, Alaska**

I'll be trading off with Christy and heading back to Fairbanks tomorrow, but just for a brief update for management, I'll just kind of start at the border end of the river and work down. In Sub District 5D, the closures are in place. The two week for 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets. So right now in 5D, there is no gillnets in the water and those closures end later on in July. Once those closures end, folks can put their 4-inch or smaller mesh set nets back on the water. They have to be 60 feet or less. There won't be any selective gear opportunities in 5D because Summer Chum salmon don't migrate that far up river. In Sub Districts 5 ABC and also in District 6, those areas will open with selective gear types after their two week closures for all 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets. Going down into District 4 and the Koyukuk River openings, there have been announced for selective gear. So right now, like in Districts 4 ABC in the Koyukuk River, you can fish with selective gear for Summer Chum, Pink and Sockeye salmon until further notice. In District 1,2,3 and down on the Coast, you can fish with your selective gear, but there are end dates that have been announced. So in District 3, you can fish with your selective gear right now, you just have to release Kings. In District 3, you have to release Kings and Chums. Starting on Wednesday, July 31st, and then in District 2 on July 29th and then District 1 and on the coast on July 26th. We just know that there's a lot going on this summer in terms of announcements and dates and what's happening in everybody's district. So, I always encourage folks to call the toll-free fishing schedule, which is 866-479-7387. And you if you call that, you'll get a recording that says what's going on in your District and what the most recent announcement was.

## **US Fish and Wildlife Service**

### **Holly Carroll, Yukon River Area Manager, Fairbanks, Alaska**

Last week there was a lot of announcements that went out as we transitioned to Fall, and so for instance, we did the last couple summer announcements announcing selective gear fishing. We also issued from the Fish and Wildlife Service Public Notice for a hearing to discuss Fall Season Management. I did receive some questions about that and about what people can expect for Fall Season Management. I just wanted to clarify that for the federal process, when we take actions longer than 60 days and so the last few years that Fall Chum run in the mainstem headed for Canada has been really poor and we have needed to close nearly the entire run. Those closures are longer than 60 days and so we'll be holding a public hearing on July 31<sup>st</sup> and I sent a notice out to all districts, all cities and tribal governments. The purpose of the public hearing is to just let people know the generic management strategy that we plan to take in some different scenarios. I know we're getting a lot of questions. Can we fish? Can we fish? You know, and it's hard for us to answer that right now because there aren't any Fall Chum in the river yet. We did put out a very brief public hearing notice and I, in that notice, discussed some of our fishing options that we might be looking at. That and it just it does look a lot like last year where we're probably going to need some mainstem closures for Fall Chum harvest. If we're very lucky and we meet drainage wide escapement goals, we might get to open some tributaries like we have with the Teedriinjik. I just wanted to let people know that that public hearing is a federal process, some of those management strategies in the Fall are sort of a longer-term closure. It's important to discuss those and to discuss the other opportunities and to just encourage people to call in to that public hearing. If you did not get the notice at your tribal council or tribal government, please get in touch with me directly, Holly Carroll (907) 351-3029. We assume most of the city governments and tribal governments are receiving our notices, but it seems like there's a lot of confusion out there this year or maybe people aren't receiving all of them. We just want to make sure we've got all your right emails and that these things are being shared in the community.

## **Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada**

### **Jaclyn Kendall, Fishery Manager**

I'm going to just go through a little bit of stock assessment, environmental and Canadian Management Updates for today. So in terms of stock assessment, at our Porcupine River camp, which is near the community of Old Crow. We experienced quite an influx of water last week, about over 3 meters, which caused issues with the sonars. So these issues thankfully have now been resolved and estimates are resuming and so as of July 14th, we have an estimated 18 Chinook salmon that have passed and those numbers will be

reviewed based on those high water issues. Updates from that camp will continue this week. As with last season, our crew on the Porcupine River will not be test netting for Chinook salmon this year. The Eagle Sonar camp is now fully operational and providing daily updates. Our DFO technicians are on site and supporting this program, along with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and they'll be there through the season. In support of the 2024 Chinook Radio Telemetry Program, DFO crews have installed towers throughout the Yukon over the past few weeks. These towers are not equipped with satellite uplinks, so we won't be able to review that data until receivers are pulled post season. I do have a very brief update for Pelly River Sonar and the Klondike River Sonar, The Pelly River Sonar, which is operated by Selkirk First Nation, has been operational July 4th and as of July 15th, there have been an estimated cumulative passage of 83 Chinook salmon so far. The Klondike River sonar, which is operated by Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation is also operational and the most recent count updates as of July 10th have 27 Chinook salmon. That's it for stock assessment. I'll move that into just a brief update on environmental conditions. Weather conditions are continuing to be cool and wet for the majority of the territory. The Porcupine River has receded back to seasonal levels, which is great and temperatures following major rainfall in the watershed in the past week have lowered. There are several tributaries of the Yukon that are below average in water level for this time of year, and a mix of warm and cool weather conditions are expected to continue. In terms of Canadian management, there are no changes to Canadian management to report for Chinook salmon in line with the newly signed Seven-year Agreement and the preliminary low Canadian-origin Chinook Salmon Outlook for 2024. DFO has closed the recreational fishery for this year and will continue to close through 2030. The current long-term closures in both the commercial and domestic fisheries will be extended through 2030 as well. We are still very much at the start of the Canadian-origin Chinook salmon run in Canada, but I will briefly touch on the management plan for Canadian-origin Chum for 2024. With the low outlook not anticipated to meet spawning objectives in Canada, the public angling fishery has been closed for 2024 and the commercial and domestic long-term closures will continue.

### **Organizational Reports:**

#### **Taylor Bradley, Yukon Salmon Subcommittee**

Not much to report here. We have our in-season meeting tomorrow where we'll be going over mostly administrative housekeeping, but we are hoping to get an update from the Department here with Yukon Government on the Eagle mine situation. On a more positive note, excited to see you and the other Alaskan participants next week for our Educational Exchange.

#### **Elizabeth McDonald, Council of Yukon First Nations**

Yeah, not much to report going on other than the Telemetry project. We've got a couple more of our towers up just yesterday with Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. Our crew was out on Nordenskoild River, putting up a tower, and then this week I think we're going to get one up on Friday, on the Teslin, and then on Monday one on the McClintock River, just trying to get the last few towers up the note. So we still got a little bit of time before Chinook salmon are in this stretch of the river. We want to get them up as soon as possible, just because it's getting close to when they'll be arriving. In the following week is the Council of Yukon First Nations General Assembly. So we'll all be out at that, we won't be able to tie in for that call. Across the territory otherwise, lots of First Nation projects are up and running and their staff are out. It's an incredibly busy time of the year and there is a big meeting happening in Mayo on Monday to Wednesday time period for land use planning. That was the Council created under the final agreements or land claims process, and they're having a traditional knowledge relationship building meeting and then moose hide starts. This happens every two years in Toronto, which in hopes that to just downstream from Dawson and it's just a big celebration. Everyone's kind of in it. Anybody is invited and TH hosts a wonderful gathering all about first. Just way of being in ceremonies and something, there's usually some salmon stuff or moose and it's just a great time and we'll be very busy, I'm sure. Luckily we've got a little bit wetter the last week and there's not quite the same concern from forest fires. I'm hoping there won't be any road closures and everybody will be able to attend. I think those are the big things happening in the next couple of weeks. Thank you for letting me share.

## **Serena Fitka, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association**

I'll go ahead and share some things YRDFAs doing. I'm actually calling in from Saint Mary's. I'm visiting with family this week. A group of us from YRDFAs was in Ruby last week, helping out with their cultural camp. We had about 20 to 25 youth in attendance and many people from the community stopped in throughout the week to participate and of course enjoy the awesome food we had for dinner. Some of the highlights from the camp were going up the Melozi, going out to Grayling, doing some fishing with the youth's got some burbot, sheefish, grayling. The kids really enjoyed themselves, they did a lot of cultural activities with some salmon skin tanning. It was a really great week. Despite the weather, we actually heard no complaints, which is awesome. So just like to thank the community of Ruby for having us out there and hopefully we'll get to travel around in the future to other culture camps. Next week we are gearing up for our Educational Exchange. We'll be departing from Fairbanks to Whitehorse on July 22nd. We'll be traveling to Dawson, Old Crow. So looking forward to this 10 day trip and we'll see you guys next week.

## **Community level reports:**

### **District 5abcd:**

#### **Eagle:**

**Andy Bassich** - Not a lot to report because we're all shut down for fishing right now. I just wanted to report the river levels are the lowest I've ever seen them here. That's about 43 years of personal observation. I've never seen water levels at Eagle this low for this time of year. Not really sure what that means, but just getting that out there. I do have a couple of questions for managers, both for Bonnie and for Fred. If they could report back on escapements reached at individual drainage where there is assessment for 2023. Did they make those escapements or not? If they could go through and report that. I would like to request if any of the drainages that have an assessment on them from this year or have reached their escapement goals or anywhere near their escapement goals for Summer Chum. I'd like to request that in the future when these reports are given, if the data when you start talking about numbers of fish passed assessment sites that they can also compare that with a 10 year average. Most people are not going to have that data in front of them. So I think it's important for people to understand right now, the comparison between what the runs are now compared to a 10 year average. I think that would be very useful for people. I think that's about all I have if those questions can be answered at this teleconference, that's great. If not, next week, we'll be fine too. But I think it's important to hear a statement from last year as compared to this year as that unfolds throughout the season. Thank you.

#### **Fred West, Summer Season Research Biologist**

The last year, the only goal for Summer Season that was met was the Summer Chum drainage wide escapement goal and no other goals were met for summer chums and no goals were met for Chinook last year. We haven't released it yet, but this week's weekly update will have the averages and the numbers compared to average, but there's various level numbers. Sometimes it's a longer term average and sometimes it's based on normal run timing years or late run timing years. But I guess all that to say that and both last year and this year, numbers are well below average for both Chinook and Summer Chum. For Summer Chum, the only goal that we've met is the drainage wide goal both the last couple of years

#### **Bonnie Borba, Fall Season Research Biologist**

I can speak for Fall Seasons. 2023, we got 13,366 is the estimate for the Delta River, which has a goal of 7,000 to 20,000, so we met that one. I have the 5-year average in front of me is about 22,000. 2023 for Chandalar was 141,000 fish. The 5-year average for that one has a different data length of the data set is almost 94,000. The goal there on the Chandler is 85,000 to 234,000. So we met that last year. The Sheenjek River, estimate last year was 15,958. That project was out of the water for several years, the long-term average was 95,000 from 74 to 2012, when we used to run the sonar there before the gap. Fishing Branch last year was 11,528. The goal there is 22 to 49,000, so it was not met. The 5-year average is about 7,700. The mainstem escapement of the Yukon last year was 22,090. The goal there is 70,000 to 104, so we did not meet that. The 5-year average is 54,000. We did meet the drainage wide, I believe we just squeaked over the

lower end of 300,000. The average for the runs, we normally get like 950,000 is the average of all the total runs for Fall Chum. We were nowhere near that last year, so that's all I have. Unless you have any other question.

**Ruby Becker** - It's nice to hear everybody like Andy said just a moment ago, the river is really, really low for this time of year. The weather has been similar to last week, with some sunny days, but often cloudy and cool. There's much less debris in the river. There has been really only one fishing household in Eagle and they pulled their 4-inch net for the closure. Another household I spoke with said that they might not even put their 4-inch net in later in August because of the high cost of gas and that it's probably not worth it for one or two whitefish. Also one person told me and asked me to report that the Eagle boat landing is in terrible condition, with huge ruts and cracks making it extremely difficult and dangerous to put in or take out a boat. People do have hope that the sacrifices we're making for the salmon will make a difference. One person had a question and I think, Fred, you already answered this, but I wasn't quick enough to piece it together. They wanted to know when will the genetic breakdowns be available for the Chinook coming into the river for this year. Specifically, they wanted to know when the Canadian-origin estimates for 2024 would be available.

### **Fred West, Summer Season Research Biologist**

We had earlier from the first strata, it was from the early run of fish, and that was at 54% from June 6th through June 23rd was 54%. We just got the breakdown from the samples for June 24th through July 8th and that's 42% Canadian-origin, both of those estimates are similar to historical averages. The last of the samples will probably be analyzed, post season and those will be available probably like on the JPC report or we might provide some information like in the season summary or something like that. So that's where that's where it currently stands.

### **Fort Yukon:**

**Kara'lissa Tremblay** - I just have nothing to report this week. If same as last week, there's no one fishing who I survey and there's some people in for done that are fishing that doesn't want to sign up for. Be involved. That's all I have to report.

### **District Y4a&c:**

#### **Anvik:**

**Sherry Kruger** - I surveyed 4 households last week and out of the four there was only one person fishing. He was using his fish wheel, he set his fish wheel for the first time. He said he was having some issues with the water being so low that there was not enough current in his normal spot that he set, so he had to move it. He said he caught, like around 70 Chum. Well, he fished for four days. He caught, like, around 70 Chum. Like 2 sheefish and two Reds and a couple of whitefish. He said that there was no abnormalities in the fish. They're really nice looking salmon. He said he was about halfway done. He would like to catch around 70 more. That we've been having a lot of rain here in the last few days. It's been rising. A little debris out there. I talked with other people and they were all hoping we would have a good Fall Chum/Silver run. So they were waiting on that to see if they would be able to fish with a larger mesh net. Other than that, that's all I have to report.

### **District Y3:**

#### **Russian Mission:**

**Wasillie Alexie** - I just wanted to ask since we're at the end of the Summer Chum season. We have bad weather all week and there's windy, raining, nonstop rain and rough out in the river. There are some people that don't have dipnets to go out and get what they want. There are some people that are asking if it would be possible to get given a few hour opening with a six inch?

## **Deena Jallen, Summer Season Manager of Yukon River**

Unfortunately, because of the really low run of Chinook salmon. We did look at the numbers quite a bit for the Summer Chum, Fall Chum and Chinook overlap and it just doesn't really look like that's an option for this season just because of the low runs at Kings. We do hope a lot more opportunities for selective gear coming up that you will get some good weather and some good conditions to go out and fish. You can also use beach seines and hook and line to hopefully get some more Chum as they come in. Up in Russian Mission, you can still fish for Chum, Sockeye and Pink salmon until July 31st with selective gear. You just have to let Kings go until then.

**Basil Larson** - Water is dropping steady pretty much nonstop rain like Wassillie said. There's no drift in the river but with the amount of rain that's been coming down, it's put a break in the fishing activity. It's twice as much work and time, effort and wood and everything, if you try and process the salmon the way we do, if there's no air or sun to help you dry this fish. So a lot of that work goes to waste unless you utilize the fishing in another way, but a lot of people have been. We've been having too crappy weather to process fish at camp. So everybody's half drying or pressure cooking their fish. There's no fish camps, they're not sending boats out, there's no nobody's out there, like the beginning of the year. So we're basically we're out of panic mode where everybody's probably a quarter to halfway what they would like historically. Compared to the numbers that we're seeing, everybody's thankful that there's the fishing opportunities. So like Wassillie said, a lot of people didn't start, due to cost or medical. Some people, they're finally trying to rebuild their fish camps from last year's flood disaster and things take a while to buy some parts to get the things rolling. Not everybody owns the proper gear. Seems like every year we have new rules and regulations, not everybody could keep up with the size, and this and that. So we try to help each other out and a lot of people have been asking for a small opportunity to use 6-inch net to have a directed chum opening, so everybody could get all the Chum that they would like and process. We understand and we respect that because nobody wants these fish back more than us. Not much fishing activity here. There was a couple of brown bears spotted close to town and there's a lot of towns close to town. Those ones were addressed and taken care of. There's not much fishing going on with the 4-inch net. There was one musher that set his net for about 5 hours and he got 6 whitefish and 150 Humpies. That's more than enough dog feed for a week. So the humpies are here in full force. A lot of the kids have been going out whenever they could. Whenever there's a little break in the weather, they've been going out to get some whitefish. It's a good traditional pastime rod and reel and my son has been coming home with a little more sheefish than normal from the whitefishing spots. I don't know what's up with that? There is a noticeable change in the genetic stock. In the Summer Chum, we could tell that these fish, these Summer Chums caught right now out here with the definitely destined for close rivers because they're starting to change color and they're starting to snaggle tooth. They're starting to look a little worn out. When you go into these whitefishing spots, you can smell when these Humpies and Summer Chums are in there to spawn. There's a distinct smell in the water. Then there's a lot of bear tracks that follow. At least the Bears will probably have some food this year. There hasn't been any accidental caught Kings, even with the dipnet. 80% of this community basically relies on subsistence. Harvesting throughout the whole year to make it throughout the year, and especially with the price of food and price of fuel. The price of everything is going up and not too many jobs around here. Like I said, we're not going to make or break the pulse for a run. We just need a little something to eat or we would like a little something to eat.

## **District Y2:**

### **St. Mary's:**

**Matty Beans** – Andreafski River we're about 51° today. It's a cold morning down here, it was 46° earlier. Thank you, guys. That's about it.

**Bill Alstrom** - There's nothing much to report from down here at Saint Mary's other than we're having unusually cold weather. Temperature as we speak is now 45°. We have a lot of rain and looks like the water came up a bit. Other than that it, same as usual. Thank you.

## **District Y1:**

### **Emmonak:**

**Paul Andrews** - Yeah, just listening in on what everybody's saying, it's been cold this last two weeks down on this end of our river here. Cold, wet and rainy but prior to that was pretty good weather for catching a few fish for a lot of people I could see that people are still trying to dry their fish right now, people that can anyway. Everything is very expensive out here for gas in every other community listening, but what I want to say is. All of our animals, all of everything that we get during our summer, fall, winter season anytime of the year. All of these come only once a year. We see salmon once a year. We see green leaves once a year, green grass once a year. Our berries are once a year. Everything that we harvest comes only once a year and you guys let us wait and wait and wait every year with regulation after regulation. To wait for the next year to come up. What? How much more waiting are we going to do before we can really get back to normal from now? We're already halfway over in our season, some people are not even prepared yet. I am for one, I for one myself are not even ready, but we need to start. You guys need to be on our side too. We only get all of these ones here, whatever we harvest. They come, but once a year. Other than that, everybody seemed to be happy with the taste of fish for a long time, including me, my family. Thanks to everyone that's here and sharing is a good thing. That's all I got to say right now. Thank you.

### **Kotlik:**

**Marvin Okitkun** - Water temperature here is about 53°. Air temperature was 46°. It's been chilly. Most everyone here had their take on salmon. Couple that are putting away their salmon. We're grateful for the opportunity to fish. The main water level is pretty normal for right for right now. Tidal surge just about three to four feet. I'm sure there'll be more water coming down the Yukon with all the rain we've been having. We're growing our salmonberries, hopefully will survive this cool weather. Getting ready for that. We're a pretty busy summer people here.

## **Open Discussion / Questions:**

**Andy Bassich, Eagle** - I have a question for the managers, both Summer Chum and Fall Chum. I'm just curious, regarding my earlier question on escapement goals being met. If they are certain to look at the drainage wide escapement goal and it's inability to meet individual escapement goals for many of the assessment projects on the Yukon River both for Summer Chum and Fall Chum. So I guess my question is, Have they been discussing that? Is it being recognized that the possibility that the drainage wide escapement goals is not fulfilling the needs for rebuilding of both Summer Chum and Fall Chum runs. That's it. Thank you.

### **Deena Jallen, Summer Season Manager of Yukon River**

It is definitely something that we have been thinking about, particularly for Summer Chum. It does seem that productivity has shifted away from the Anvik River that used to be a larger contributor to the Summer Chum run than it is now. It's possible that we're getting more and more Pinks in the Anvik and then fewer Summer Chum in the Anvik. That productivity may be shifting up to the Koyukuk. Unfortunately, we don't have assessment projects up there, so we don't know how that system is doing yet this year. There will be aerial surveys flown later on this summer, which is good because right now a lot of the Summer Chum projects in Anvik, Chena and Salcha are being affected by high water. So they're not counting the fish that are going by, I guess the Summer Chum, we have been getting hundreds of thousands of Summer Chum last year. We got almost 900,000 and while we didn't see them at escapement projects, we also didn't harvest very many of them and those fish went somewhere, presumably. Similarly, this year we've got over 600,000 Summer Chum salmon that are going somewhere, they're spawning somewhere. We just don't necessarily know or have a great assessment project to see where they went. With that, I'll turn that over to Fred, if you've got any more detail to add about what the considerations are for Summer Chum goals.

### **Fred West, Summer Season Research Biologist**

They know the Board of Fish process is coming up and one of the plan is to go through and evaluate the goals for Summer Chum, for the Andreafski, Anvik and also the drainage wide. Deena was saying that the



last couple of years, assessment of Summer Chum has been poor because of high water and we aren't able to assess what the Koyukuk is doing. They did the radio telemetry projects for Summer Chum back in 2014 and 2015, that showed that the fish have moved from the Anvik and they went up, I think Koyukuk was one of the raises that they kind of moved into. Definitely with limited assessment, it's hard to know where some of these fish are going and hopefully we'll have better visibility with aerial surveys this year. The weather has not been cooperating the last few years, there's definitely some questions of where some of these fish are going. The year that we did have, was it 2021, when we had the record low run. You didn't see that many Chum in the Lower River and at LYTF. In the last couple of years we have been seeing substantial numbers at LYTF. It means the assessment at the different projects, at least like on the mainstem, seem to be assessing them. It's an interesting perspective of where those fish may be heading. The assessment that we have has been impacted the last few years because of weather. Thanks.

### **Christy Gleason, Yukon Area Fall Season Manager**

I can answer the Fall Chum question and then Bonnie can weigh in afterwards if she wants. So what we have going on with Fall Chum is, the population's been doing really good the last 20 years and then in 2020, we had a multi-species salmon decline on the Yukon River. Since then, the Summer Chum run is starting to improve, the Fall Chum run is starting to improve a little bit and last year, we were just above the drainage wide goal. I think we had about 312,000 and our drainage wide goal is 300,000 to 600,000 and we were in the middle of our escapement goal for both the Teedriinjik River and the Delta River. That's a big bonus for U.S. fishermen. Unfortunately, when we're coming out of this 5-year salmon decline. The weakest Fall Chum component is the Canadian stocks and they used to make up 25 to 30% of the Fall Chum run and ever since 2020, we have seen a really low contribution of both the mainstem Fall Chum and the Fishing Branch. The Fishing Branch has been more variable over the longer term of how much they contribute to the Fall Chum run. It's been between 1% to 4% and it used to be a stable 4%. For the mainstem Canada and Fishing Branch, we have seen some habitat changes, we've seen some dewatering in the Fishing Branch River. We've seen a major glacial shift in 2016 that those returns came back in 2020. It's going to be a permanent shift for the mainstem that are crossing the border at Eagle, and that's not reversible. So yes, we're trying to meet our drainage wide escapement goal for Fall Chum. Trying to meet our US escapement goals and provide opportunity, but unfortunately, we have to stop fishing when the Fall Chum arrive because we're not able to meet the two Canadian treaty objectives at this point and there's continued discussions going on with Yukon River Panel about what to do moving forward with this situation. But there's not much we can do about it right now, but I'll let Bonnie weigh in if she has anything else.

### **Bonnie Borba, Fall Season Research Biologist**

Our range of 300 to 600,000, in most years above 300,000, we can make most of our tributary goals except you know like the Porcupine and the mainstem to make it to Canada, it takes a little more fish. To be sure, we're going to make those on the goals that we have now. So they align pretty good except for the issues we're having with Canada that like some of those are like you said there, the glacier is not going to come back and whatever issues that are affecting. Them is going to be a different solution.

**Andy Bassich, Eagle** – Yeah. Thank you. I just wanted to thank the managers for that information. I think that's really important for people to understand and appreciate that and look forward to hearing more discussion on that into the future. Thank you.

**Ken Chase, Anvik** - I had a question for the escapement. I tried listening to the toll-free number a couple of times to try to pick up pick up on the Andreafski and Anvik River escapement or the goals. Right now, what's the count for those two rivers?

### **Fred West, Summer Season Research Biologist**

So with the Andreafski, the water is high, it came up over the weekend and it's still there. The weir is not fish tight, but they're still able to see a few fish passing. The numbers are considered an estimate and those runs seem to be really, really late. We didn't see any fish for the longest time and then we just started seeing fish over the last week. We've seen 22 Chinook salmon and 173 Summer Chum salmon. For the Anvik, similar to the other system tributaries. The high water is causing issues there and so the water started to rise

over the 13th and 14th and they needed to pull the sonar midday on the 14th. So up to that point, they had 75,771 Summer Chum. So that's the current number for now. They're not able to assess anything right now.

**Ken Chase, Anvik** - That's an improvement. I fished a little while the other day and I gave a report to the fish counter person here. The Chums that's going out on the mainstem of the river look really good this year. Right now. They're smaller fish, but they really seem to have good quality flesh and have fat in their bellies. The ones that we got, I didn't get very many, but I had my fishwheel, I stopped it today too. I had a couple of logs in there for the last couple of days and couldn't run it so we quit. So I'm done with it, but yeah, OK. Thanks.

**Mike Wood, Alaska Board of Fisheries** - I had a question for some of the people from Canada. I was waiting to the end to ask, but are there any updates on that Eagle mine? The cyanide leach into Haggard Creek, tributary of the Yukon, is there any updates on that? Could follow up. I just like to ask if there's any local observations below. The mine breach from people that live in the area.

**Bill Wall, DFO Whitehorse** - I'm not sure what folks are aware of, but maybe a little bit of background. June 24<sup>th</sup>, it was communicated by Victoria Gold that at their Eagle Mine site that they had a heap leach pad failure, which meant that some of the ore that had been stored on site. Used for separating the gold from the ore, that portion of the other facility had slid into the water course down below of the heap leach pad itself. What that meant is materials entered the water course, in particular Dublin Gulch, which feeds into Haggard Creek. Subsequently or just after that, the Yukon government had done some water sampling testing and it was confirmed that cyanide was found below the facility. As a result, both the federal government, Canada and the Yukon Government has launched an investigation into the incident and are trying to determine what the downstream impacts of that event may be. Currently, both Canada and the federal departments, the Yukon government and the Nacho Nyak Dun First Nation are collaborating on developing a long-term monitoring program currently so that any impacts to fish or fish habitat can be documented. I think that's everything, happy to answer any questions, but due to the nature of the investigation, there's really not a lot else that we can share at this time.

**Dennis Zimmerman, Chairman, Yukon Salmon Subcommittee** - I'm just following up on the Eagle mine. Just wanted to let everyone know that the Government of Canada is working on it with the Government of Yukon. A lot of government agencies and the First Nation governments. There are a number of others there that are actively working on it. Trying to give salmon voice in this as well as freshwater fish. We've been quite active on this, we've got some briefings coming up. We should have more information, there is information from local knowledge that people are obviously very concerned. We're trying to deal with the initial emergency and then deal with some of these other things. Just wanted to assure everyone that we are all trying to work on it and we are concerned about it. I'm really happy that it has come up in this forum. Thanks.

**Mike Wood** - I'd just like to ask is, are there any local observations or place for locals in the area to report evidence of dead fish or contaminated water?

**Bill Wall** - Yeah. As I mentioned earlier, so that the local First Nation, Nacho Nyak Dun, they are actively monitoring the area looking at potential impacts to fish and fish habitat as well as water quality.

**Brooke Woods, Rampart** - I wanted to share. I've just have had a lot of time to reflect with no subsistence fishing opportunity and just wanted to share the everyday reality of Alaska Native families living on the Yukon that have no subsistence salmon opportunity, up until now. It's unclear if there will be any openings for Fall Chum. So having said that, my family, we relocated here to our village in Rampart for the summer and that's about a month and 1/2 for us. Brought over quite a large volume of food by highway and boat to offset the cost of commercial foods. That lasted maybe 10 to 12 days of our store bought protein because we don't have any salmon main staples and fresh produce. Thankfully, my family has the resources and a family member in town to shop for us. It's just really hard for me personally that two packages of steak was \$13.99 per pound. So 2 packages of steak is roughly \$140.00 and that is maybe 2 or 3 meals for my family. Thankfully, 5 of my kids are here with me, which we haven't been able to do this with work and school schedules, so I just wanted to share that. Then you have to add on freezing your protein so it stays because

there's no guarantee your food's going to get here. Our second shipment had to come in by plane and the cost of cardboard boxes and freight really adds to that expense. I was thinking about the federal disaster relief, I just hope that the money that subsistence families get reflects the high cost of replacing subsistence foods. I was thinking about the pandemic EBT card that many families got. So the electronic benefit transfer and I feel like the state should do something similar for subsistence, not because families are poor but the AYK region is one of the largest subsistence areas and these are things that I would consider if I was the Governor or the Commissioner. So, just food for thought and again, store bought protein is very expensive. It's not the healthiest options either. With the weather, I feel like it's been raining for weeks and with climate change in my community, the two creeks that we depend on for drinking water are not safe right now. The water's been too high and the water's been too dirty. So even having access to fresh, healthy drinking water is a challenge. My family and I, we had to bring over 25 gallons of Fox Spring water and two cases of water because we just do not have any water to drink or cook with. These are just like everyday realities and in all honesty like a case of water is not a healthy option either because of the amount of plastics that are found. I'm looking forward to the restrictions being lifted and the ability to catch non-salmon species. My children, they qualify for educational opportunities with our subsistence harvest. We did start berry picking, so we started raspberry picking and we'll transition into blueberry soon. I also wanted to share that I was part of the AYK working group for the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force, and the report has been finalized this week and sent to Congress. It does highlight the urgent need and action to address the salmon declines and one of the things that was identified was bycatch and marine harvest, so Area M. I'm still struggling that the area manager has not attended these teleconferences and I believe she's from Eagle. So she is connected to the people and the salmon. Every family is different along the Yukon. Some families have Summer employment or no employment, large families to single households and elders. Some families have a boat, equipment and funds to be out on the river. Others don't have employment or equipment, and this matters because regardless of having funds or equipment, we have a sharing network and it's large. So the network is local to statewide. I just want to reiterate the importance of our traditional values as Alaska Native people that we've stewarded these fish and wildlife for over 10,000 years. We still really live by our values, sustaining our fish populations and also being able to share and provide for those that are unable to. It's been rainy, high water and I've seen quite a bit of debris. My son and I have had to move the raft almost every day or check on it. I am worried about the mining failure as our salmon are migrating to their spawning grounds. So many families are making huge sacrifices and it's just another factor that we have to consider for the decline and I did miss the Fall Chum production or outlook. I know for myself personally, we haven't put a net in the water, we're protecting the King salmon, but really hoping for something with this Fall. I know a lot of families are too, 1 or 2 weeks or 1 or 2 fishing opportunities. Again, not asking for a lot, but having some basis to our food security for the winter. If we are unable to get a moose. Last year, my family again, I have a very large family, we had to split a moose four ways, so that was one of the reasons why we had to bring so much commercial foods and protein, those are my thoughts. A lot of what I share is not directed to the managers, it's the higher positions in the state that are making these decisions. I am really struggling with the agreement, if it was done with tribes, I think it would be better received. It just seems like a failure to try to increase this statement to 71,000, when we don't even see those numbers right now for Chinook and to make 71,000 escapement for the next 7 years. I don't know if that's possible and that we will continue to fail meeting escapement. If this agreement was done with tribes, I feel like there would have been better buy in and support of it brings for me personally, it just brings a lot of having to restart working relationships and trust. It's just a really hard burden for tribes to have to carry. Those are my comments, Again, I've been reflecting because we do have a very quiet life here on the Yukon with no salmon. Thankfully I have kids that keep me busy. Outdoors and I work remote. Thank you for letting me have all this time.

**Serena Fitka, YRDFA** - Just to let you know that we do have Matthew Keyse, who is the Area Management Biologist for the South Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutian Islands, who will be on the call next week. He is doing his job in the Area M, he was quite busy today and wasn't able to join the call but he said he'll make time next week. So go ahead and spread the word out. We'll make sure we post it on our social media and our website that we will be providing an update for Area M.

**George Donart, Lower River Fisherman** - I'm wondering, if fish and game, if they're doing anything to address the need to deal with the high water on the tributary monitoring? As far as being able to continue that without having a big break to rebuild and close up to tighten up all the weirs and things like that. Because it just seems like we're going to get more of those big rainfall events as climate change gets worse.

**Holly Carroll, Yukon River Area Manager**

Yeah, I didn't catch the gentleman's name who asked the question, but you know, those are really good questions. Here at Fish and Wildlife Service, a lot of questions about what we should be focusing on in our research on and stuff like that is coming up. In full transparency, we have been running the Andrafski Weir and formerly the Gisasa Weir, which is up on the Koyukuk drainage for many, many years. It's a really long-term data set and one of the things we're finding, just like the gentleman says, is that in recent years we are having a lot more flash flooding and high waters. Fire events, flooding events, all of those things make it so that we don't always get a good count. It's a really expensive project to run and we have always relied on the Office of Subsistence Management pot of funding called Fisheries Resource Monitoring Projects FRMP and you know we are going to be considering whether we're going to put in for another proposal for that or our final year is next year. One of our considerations is that we may not do that and that is partly because it is such an expensive project and we don't get reliable data sets year after year. We almost have a 50% success rate in recent years and that is because of the changes we've seen and I don't want to speak for Tanana Chiefs Conference but they run the Henshaw Weir. We partnered with them to take over the Gisasa Weir, but they are also struggling with those same kind of things. I think a lot of projects do, but with sonar often you can get the sonar back in sooner. What do we do about it in the short-term? There's almost nothing we can do. We'll try to interpolate when we miss a few days, we can use kind of what came before, what came after. If it's a short enough period. But unfortunately, when the weir is not fish tight, there's not a ton we can do about it. So instead, we might need to look at what is more pressing research? One of the things that we're hoping is that there will be more citizen engagement in helping us define or identify what is the most important priority needs. I'm looking to the Fish Commission. I'm looking to Regional Advisory Councils. I'm looking to YR DFA and other fishermen throughout the drainage. Tribal governments to tell us what kind of research they really think is important. One of the things I'm hearing is, where are the Summer Chum going? To that end, one of the things we are looking into is redoing a telemetry study for Summer Chum because they did used to be in huge numbers in the Anvik, and much higher numbers in the Andrafski and if they've moved to other drainages. Where are they moving? So that's a long-winded answer, but hopefully it sort of at least gets to that we're not imagining this and that we are working on it, but we are going to need all of you to help advise us on what you think the top priorities are.

**Ken Chase, Anvik** - Hearing those comments right now from those from Deena and from George, they're right on track and that's the Anvik River. Another thing that should be brought out on the Anvik River, because I know the river here, is because years ago about 15 years or so more. I was told by Joe Redington Sr. was up fishing in the Norton Sound Area and when they told him all the Pinks were coming in, he said that was going to have a bad thing on the Summer Chum and I think that's part of the problem too. Last couple of runs pinks were terrible and that may contribute something to the low counts, but the Fish and Game has to deal with, whoever's running that weir really has to deal with the high water and start adapting to do that so we know what's getting there and I appreciate those two people bringing that up. Thanks.

**Serena Fitka, YR DFA** - I'd like to also mention that YR DFA is collaborating with ADF&G and USGS. We do have a Carcass survey that we are in our second year up the Andrafski River, I called it South Fork. We have a biologist who's going to be floating down that fork and taking carcass surveys and looking at egg retention and timing levels. We have that project going on, that's another eyes on the ground looking at numbers. We are trying to get at least 100 carcasses surveyed, but we won't know that until the end of that project. They should be deploying early August. So we will definitely have a report on that once that is complete.

**Andy Bassich, Eagle** - I just wanted to thank Brooke for bringing up the working group report to Congress. She identified that one of the top priorities from that working group was bycatch but actually the highest priority from that working group were hatchery produced Pinks. So that's a very big concern and that's

impacting all species of salmon potentially, except for maybe Sockeye. That's why fish are getting smaller. There's a lot of scientific peer reviewed papers that are finding that be true and people have the opportunity to see that report. You'll also see that it's international, tremendous amount of Pink salmon being produced in Russia and the United States, primarily down at Prince William Sound. So those are impacting Chinook salmon and Chum salmon. So just putting that on the radar for people on the river, it's not just bycatch, it's not just climate change, that's a man-made cause that we should be addressing, or at least understanding the impacts of it. Thank you, I just wanted to bring up more information.

**Bill Alstrom, St. Mary's** - I just start listening in and all these factors. What's going on with the Yukon fish? There can be a lot of factors involved, we don't know what's going on the other side of the border. We all watch this gold rush program. They don't seem to give a hoot to know what's going on with the Lower Yukon River regarding our salmon. It's been going on for how many years now? Four or five years that we had that we practically have no Kings coming up the river and our Chums are really low. There's got to be something, it seems like nothing's working. We've had an unusually, like I mentioned before, a measly cold summer. As I speak right now it's 45°F, that's pretty cold for this time of the year. Although fish enjoy their cold, cold waters, but nothing seems to be working. How do we go back? I don't know what we should do, you know? Nitpick or whatever. What's going on the river? It's been happening too long. Too long. People suffer in the villages. If food stamps didn't exist, all these stores would go belly up. It's just what's keeping them alive. Then we get the reduction in flights out of Anchorage, I think we just get 2-3 flights a week to supplement the stores. Something is really going on, it's got a lot of factors involved. It's really heartbreaking to know that we the people that live along the river are the ones suffering the most. You never see prices go down, they all seem to stay at where they're at or go up. Let us see the price of gas go down. It all seems to go up and the groceries you go to a local store. You buy a little sack of groceries that costs about \$200-300. It's just disheartening to see people suffer on the Yukon because of the lack of fish. We can't do anything about that because fish are fish. When they swim up the river, they go up regardless. All that being said, just a matter of I don't want to say chance but whatever you know, that's my rant for today, Thank you.

*Call ended 2:53 PM*