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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 8th 2022 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, July 26, 2022. Call lasted 119 minutes. 59 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:

KYUK - Olivia Ebertz

Political Representatives participating:

Samuel from Senator Sullivan's Office
Cordelia Kellie, Senator Murkowski's Office

Communities participating:

Whitehorse
Dawson
Eagle
Circle
Fort Yukon
Yukon River Bridge
Tanana
Huslia
Grayling
Anvik
Russian Mission
Marshall
Pilot Station
St. Mary's
Mountain Village
Emmonak

Management Reports:

Bonnie Borba - Fall Season Research Biologist

- ADFG Fall Season Research biologist, up in Fairbanks.
- 2nd lowest chum numbers in sonar, projection below 300,000 fish, average run is over 900,000
- To date, Mountain Village test fishery is as low as last year for Fall chum.
- Pilot Sonar - transitioned to fall counts on July 19. As of July 25, 66000 chum salmon passage.
- Counts are similar to 2020. Midpoint of the season is August 9.
- Targeted escapement goal is 300,000
- Eagle sonar will transition to fall counts in mid-August. Bulk of run occurs Mid to end of August. Goal is to radio tag 350 salmon.
- Hope to learn more about run timing and genetics of this run from this project.

Fred West - Summer Season Research Biologist

- The chinook and summer season runs are done in the lower river. The midpoint of the chinook run is predicted to reach the Pilot sonar on July 15
- The run was the second weakest on record.
- We did not meet the 500-1.2M escapement goal based on the preliminary data.
- Assessment projects: Anvik 44,906, below average.
- See fall season update from this morning for all of these average numbers compared to this year's actual.
- We have aerial surveys for lower and middle river starting next week to count projects where we were unable to get weirs operational.
- Update on Ick: We've initiated a study to see the impact. This requires the sacrifice of chinook. Discussion and concerns have been raised. Lower river is complete. Middle is complete. Eagle is on going. We are reducing the sampling due to the low run size. This does reduce our ability to study higher level questions. We will follow up as more information becomes available. We may not be able to answer all the questions today. Please reach out to us off line, outside of this call for detailed questions and answers.

Christy Gleason, Fall Season Yukon River Manager - ADFG

- In Emmonak, it is stormy
- About 10 days into the fall season. Tracking with the 2020 fall season run, the lowest we've ever seen
- At Lower Yukon test fishery, only caught 16 salmon so far. 1st quarter near Pilot Station is near the end of July, too early to tell how the season will shape up.
- Beluga whales have been seen near the mouth of the river. These reports are common with low chum salmon runs
- Transition to fall season, chum closure will continue since escapement goals aren't met. We need chum salmon to reach spawning grounds this season.
- Lower Yukon districts are under fall management, District 4 is transitioning to fall management this week. Chum and Chinook need to be released alive, Humpies, Sockeyes, Silver can be caught.

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

- I don't have much to add, as Fred relayed the Chinook and Chum summer runs are well before average. So those fisheries will remain closed.
- Water levels are trending down towards average.
- Water temperatures are average.

- We had a big wind storm, some people may still be without power.

Holly Carroll - Yukon River Area Manager

- Don't have too much to add, worth reminding fisherman that 4" gear is labeled for non-salmon, if salmon is caught in that gear, we hope you let it go if it is alive, if it is already dead you can keep it. If you are catching a lot of salmon, we hope you move the gear to another location or checking it a lot more frequently. Rare to see such low passage of chum, we want as many to get upriver to spawn,

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Oliver Barker DFO:

- Oliver Barker: There are two Chinook assessment projects being run right now in Canada.
- Porcupine: Chinook passage was 299 as of Sunday. Substantially lower than average. Right on par with last years numbers.
- Klondike: Chinook passage was 114 as of Sunday. Substantially lower than average.
- Preparations are well underway for the Weir to be operational next week.
- High waters in the upper areas, but on their way down.
- Northern Yukon, Porcupine remains low
- Water temperatures were really warm, and have now cooled down.
- As Bonnie and Fred spoke about, the summer Chum has been very low, we anticipate the same for Fall Chum.

Jaclyn Kendall - Acting Fisheries Manager, DFO

- Key priority for management in Canada is to ensure as many Chum make it to Canada origin as possible.
- In terms of chum, we don't anticipate that there will be allocation to subsistence fishery
- As mentioned previously, DFO will maintain closures throughout 2022.

Community level reports:

CANADA

Whitehorse: Elizabeth - Emergencies are starting to calm down on our side. The last few weeks have been cooler with rain. This has decreased the forest fire situation and the heat warning. And fortunately the extra rain doesn't appear to be affecting flooding. Most places have seen the water level start to decrease. But water levels are still high. The highways are mostly open. The bypass is still in use on the Alaska Highway (just on the BC side) and still only one lane at Horse Creek (just north of Whitehorse). Both of these washouts were caused by beaver dam failures. Both sites have been changed tremendously.

On the salmon front, an official from DFO is in town today and most Canadians will be meeting with her. For fishing, everyone is saying not to fish, that all the Chinook need to reach their spawning grounds. I heard that fishers in Old Crow are removing all nets from the river (Monday to Friday) and only allowing nets for whitefish on the weekends. Along the mainstem, several FN Governments have pre-existing moratoriums to not fish for Chinook. I also heard that youth camps have switched from catching a few Chinook to purchasing sockeye for the camps. This is extremely disheartening because we have 30 year olds that have never fished for salmon along the Yukon River. Without these camps teaching, we are losing the knowledge of how to fish and preserve salmon.

Everyone I have heard from is extremely worried about Chinook and making sure they continue to exist. While Chinook have not been able to provide Canadians with a dependable and plentiful food source in 3 decades, they are still extremely important to everyone and key to the ecosystem. We hope that by letting them all spawn that Chinook will be able to recover from this crash.

Dawson: Sebastian: We are lining up for a worse repeat than in the past. A whole bunch of Chinook Salmon showing up at Pilot and aren't making it to Canada. I would appreciate a comment from the Managers on what you think is going on, where are the fish going? The river is cooler than it was last year. Chums as well.

Oliver Barker, DFO: It does look as though the numbers are not matching like they should. There are a number of different options as to what is going on: 1. It could be getting over counted at Pilot. 2. There could be under reported harvest. 3. The fish can be dying along the way. Water temperature seems to not be a large driver. Ick could be a big driver. A number of options that a number of us are putting a great deal of attention to.

Dawson - Sebastian - Thanks Oliver. Quality of salmon has changed over the years, average size of salmon has gone down. This decline is continuing, and it might impact their ability to migrate. Oliver - There has been a considerable decline in body size and age, gradual decline over a number of years. It doesn't help because smaller fish produce fewer eggs. The population suffers.

ALASKA

District Y5abc&d:

Eagle: Ruby: Everything is pretty quiet. The river is maintaining its slightly higher than average water level. Not a lot of drift. Lower temperatures have been welcome. We've been getting some pretty consistent rain, which we needed. No one is fishing. No subsistence nets. It's a hard thing to talk about right now. A lot of people have really emotional connections. I wish I had more to report.

Circle: Larry - river is high. I have a question: Although we can fish with a 4" net, if we catch a chinook or chum you throw it away. Is there any reporting of that happening?

Deena - No requirement to report fish that are released alive on your permit. We have heard from people that if they're alive we try to let them go, if they're dead you can keep them.

Larry - Salmon fishing is open with 4"?

Deena - No, it is closed. If you catch salmon let it go if it's alive, move your net if you are catching salmon.

Fort Yukon: Rochelle - I just wanted to get on and share that I am feeling everything that everyone else is feeling. It is heartbreaking and sad. I know our people are really suffering. I was listening to the questions earlier and it is really frustrating that we don't have any answers. It is your full time job to find solutions. We are stewards of the land and I am so thankful that people are still willing to get on these calls and have discussions with the managers. It would be great if we could have some answers. I hear the questions, but we need answers and facts. We are at the point where we can't say "we don't know" anymore. We really need answers. We need the managers to find them and share them. We owe it to the salmon and the people. We are putting

our lives in your hands, literally. We need answers. We can't go another year like this. It is a big responsibility that you are holding. Please do better.

Deena - I hear your frustrations. We want to do in season info, but we also have a lot of big questions to ask, and the results from this seasons won't be shared until later this winter. More information will be shared through YRDFA newsletters and other means. Katie is doing research in the Bering Sea and show early marine life stage impacts. Hard to find answers when the problems are big and complicated but we are searching for them. Participating in AC meetings this winter.

Rochelle - Thank you for your response. Can you include any kind of opportunities to get people involved and jobs? We need to get Indigenous people in these roles.

Deena - We highly encourage people to apply to be a fish technician at Workplace Alaska, we had a hard time hiring this past spring.

Yukon River Bridge: Don Stevens - I have a couple of comments about the closure. I think it is good for the fish on the river. It's been hard, but we've got to go with it to protect our fish. There is always big money out there in the Ocean with the incidental catch that should be coming to the Yukon. We've been talking about that for years, but maybe it's too big of a money thing to worry about subsistence. For the people on the river, we had the closure on the river last year and we had to go through that. I think if we are going to shut the river down for fall and summer chum, we should shut the whole thing down. If you want white fish do it on the ice like we used to do. The gentleman in Canada said that something is going on with the fish. We all have respect for the river. It is tough to talk about because fish come in at the mouth and then at the flats there are a lot of water ways, I know a lot of people in the flats that have a hard time getting fish. The gentleman from Canada mentioned that they are not getting the numbers that are supposed to be coming. I would like to talk about shutting the whole river down so there aren't any incidental catches.

Tanana: Stan Zuray Rapids teleconference report:

The water depth is stable now but still high. Some slight drift due to the slight rise we just had.

- Only a few camps open at all now. Just feeding the few small dog teams left in the village.
- Almost all are Humpback and Bering cisco whitefish and numbers have picked up over the last couple of low number weeks but still not that great. The occasional small Chinook caught are almost all showing signs of something wrong with them such as worn out thin bodies and/or Ichthyophonous diseased hearts and flesh. Starting to see ICH in the majority of those 4" mesh caught Chinook hearts but sample size is so small can't really say much for sure at all.
- Run seems to definitely be in the stage where traditionally fishermen stop fishing for Chinook and wait for the better quality Fall Chum.
- Fishermen are hoping Fall Chum numbers are good enough for some limited fishing though all seem to be aware of the projected poor run strength.

District Y4a&c:

Koyukuk River:

Huslia: Lisa Bifelt: Contacted 6 households got a hold of 4, none are fishing, one is using 4” targeting whitefish.

Christy - What community?

Lisa - Huslia.

Christy - All salmon fishing closed, you can only use 4” gillnet for non-salmon. Handful of other non-salmon gear - pike net, dipnet, spear.

District Y4a:

Grayling: Shirley - I have a 3 part question: Fall Chum, is there subsistence fishing? Where do they spawn, mainly?

Christy - We are looking at a run that is less than 300,000 fish. So fall chum fishing is closed right now. We will see if the run improves, but at this point we can't provide any opportunity.

For spawning... listed a couple of rivers, Canada - to Porcupine, Tanana river, and mainstem Canada by Eagle.

Shirley - Is sport salmon fishing closed for the yukon and tributaries?

Christy - in short, the Chinook and Chum are closed for subsistence, so that means that sport is also closed.

Anvik: Alberta - This week contacted and interviewed 4 households, 1 fisher fished up the Anvik, others did not fish but were given sheefish from the fisherman. No fisherman have been fishing for fall chum or chinook. That's all.

District Y3:

Russian Mission: Sandra - I wanted to find out what was going on with our fishing season for the fall chum.

Christy - All of the salmon fishing is closed right now because the run size is too small to allow for any harvest.

Sandra - I wish we could get at least 5 or 10. That would be better than nothing. Give us just one opening to share with everyone.

Christy - I hear you each week. I talk to many of the fishermen here in Emmonak. I know how hard it is. I wish that there is something we can do to bring the fish back. But we need to make sure that there are enough fish for future generations, so at this time I cannot allow any fish.

Sandra - Are they still pollock fishing in the ocean? Maybe they are taking all of our fish? If they do, what are they doing with them? We are way up here in the river and we don't have any access to anything else.

Christy - Yes, every year there are incidental catches, and it is beyond our control in terms of management here in the Yukon River.

Sandra - can you do something, have a meeting with the Pollock people and see if they can not pollock fish for a few years like us.

Christy - yes. Serena has done a really good job at speaking up for the fisherman on the Yukon River.

Shirley - in the north Pacific group, who are the people from the State that are representing us?

Christy - I think there is a seat that represents the commissioner of fish and game. They are very aware of the Yukon Salmon decline. I don't know what actions are being taken or moving forward in the council.

Shirley - Are you saying that we shouldn't send letters to the governor and congress and president's office?

Serena - No, don't stop sending those out. We encourage tribes to send out letters of support.

Shirley - Here's a suggestion - we recommend 100+ people to go to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meeting.

District Y2:

Marshall: Diane - The fisherman that participated in the survey took their nets out. They are waiting for fall chum to put their nets back in. Their main concern is Area M and if we are doing anything to stop it. Nothing new to report here.

Serena - We've submitted letters to the commissioner. We've requested a meeting with the Governor and have not heard anything. We will request another one. And that is in conjunction with 13 other organizations. There are also the AYK fishery meetings coming up in January and we will be looking at proposals for that meeting.

Pilot Station:

Martin - reporting at Pilot Station at tribal office - water level has tapered off, no debris. 48 degrees, hardly any bugs. Raining for half of July. No one is subsisting any fish at this time. Residents are going out to pick berries. Berries are impacted by the weather. Over the years the YRDLA teleconferences have shown salmon to extinction, I haven't caught any salmon for 3 years, management has failed to protect our salmon, I don't know if money is impacting our ability to protect salmon, pollock fishery is protected. There have been two full cycles of chinook since the crash. The overstock of one salmon will impact the other. Surprised the pink salmon isn't included in decline. All other rivers including Kuskokwim river have been allowed to fish for subsistence. My uncle asked me when they will allow him to harvest salmon. We failed him because we weren't able to provide him with Yukon River salmon. We are in dire need, the price of fuel is out of control and are in dire food security levels. Pollock trawler fishery and Area M, heat stress, international fishing vessels intercepting salmon, disease amongst salmon, warming temperatures causing ICK, Fukushima radiation, all impacting salmon. Recently read an article on KYUK regarding NPFMC - Council member said that our current numbers show large numbers of salmon dying in the ocean for reasons that aren't entirely understood. Surprised our Canadian allies haven't contested illegal poaching and bycatch that have contributed to decline. Lawyers who represent our inherent rights outreach. Someone else has interfered with their means of survival, we have been forced to survive on other, lesser species, beef, chicken, higher costs and prices for fuel. Management allows Yukon Salmon to be incidentally caught by everyone except Alaska Native People, we can't eat what is in our DNA. Management is working backwards.

St. Mary's: Eric - This summer has really impacted our economy and people. If we can't even get 5000 fish to the border we need to really do something before it's too late. This will have dramatic impacts on other industries. Fleets, State of Alaska, Federal Government. If we declare it (chum) as an endangered species all things have to stop. We need to change. More and more people in the community are moving away, they can't afford to live here, food and fuel are extreme. Not a lot of help from the State of Alaska and the Federal government, lots of lip service. Boats and motors that aren't used because there's no subsistence and they can't afford fuel. Disaster Aid still hasn't been given to communities. I hate to see suicide occur in these areas, where food isn't being given. Moose hunting is a hot topic, it will be the only other resource available for food, the state will need to do a lot soon. Thanks.

Bill Alstrom - I heard the comments from Eric and Pilot Station. It baffles me that the Department of Fish and Game are not doing their job. I think they have a good plan. I would like to hear from these two Characters, do they have a better plan? The Department of Fish and Game has their back against the wall. If there is no fish, there is no fish. If they have a better plan than what the department is doing, I would sure like to hear it.

Mt. Village: Stan- I got carried away and forgot about the 1:00 call. Not too much to report, unless Nita already gave a report. Did she already report? River is rough, not too much activity with subsistence.

Nita - I spoke with 2 people last week. Some are afraid to participate. They are afraid fish and game will start putting restrictions on non salmon species. It's been raining, no one has been going on a boat other than people picking berries.

Stan - Everytime I run down to camp I listen to the radio. They talk about three different series on subsistence. From my knowledge, sometimes I say we are catching too much. The elders would say, when you fish or hunt, the more you harvest, the more will be replenished. They would say that fish and game is making a big mistake by restricting us. It is not written in the knowledge that has been passed down. The good Lord will provide. What we don't use will be depleted. *Gives muskrat example* The Eskimo way is the more that you gather, the more will be replenished. The radio station is going to Emo to interview fish camps on their way up to St. Marys. There are maybe 10 that I know of.

District Y1:

Emmonak: Billy Charles - Thank you to those in Marshall. This is really hard on men too when women ask what's going on and our hands are bound, it's a real impact and stress. Out here the water is high, counted about 25 fish, about 5 days ago. Just thinking about the proposal, hoping a community will put forward a proposal on Area M, that people will bring forward community members, grandmothers to testify and show what is going on in the Yukon. If I could afford it I would bring my wife forward to show you what the impacts are on us. At ADFG we want representation. Equalize those people that are against our proposal. The other concern I have is no indication of fish. Not sure what fish are coming through with storm surge, maybe humpies, but they are showing up at the sonar. Just wanted to share.

Additional Speakers:

Victor Lord - River has been dropping, it's been cool. We've welcomed the cool weather. Maybe it will help what little fish we have make it to the spawning grounds. Our culture camp is still going. They are cutting and hanging fish from Bristol Bay. My hats off to the teachers for their efforts. Things are going well. They put in a garden for alternative foods and to keep the kids busy. Comment from Martin and Eric. Good stuff. But I am with Bill, I can't blame fish and game. I guess we are all at fault. Good to hear you, Eric.

Eric - Good to hear you Victor. By setting it down to endangered, it would change it all the way to the ocean, it would also help in Washington DC to open up more money. Only 1.2 million a year for studies, we need adequate money for studies, and that amount doesn't go too far over two countries. Need better funding. I'm really worried about the numbers in Canada. In 3-4 years we might be down to a thousand fish, and then what? For it to be declared as endangered species they need to fall below 70%, I believe right now they are at 11%.

Call ended 2:59pm