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

Here is a summary of the 8th 2023 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, July 25th, 2023. Call lasted 117 minutes. 58 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:**

**Political Representatives participating:**

**Communities participating:**

**Alakanuk**

**Kotlik**

**Mt. Village**

**St. Mary's**

**Pilot Station**

**Russian Mission**

**Anvik**

**Huslia**

**Ruby**

**Tanana**

**Nenana**

**Old Crow**

**Dawson**

**Management Reports:**

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game**

**Deena Jallen, Emmonak, ADFG Summer Season Manager of Yukon River** - Transitioning to fall season, District 2,3,4, 5a,b,c are still open for summer chum. Pulse 4 is 333000 fish, mostly in District 4 now. Folks hopefully fish with selective gear. District 6a&b and upper Tanana fishing open, a small area near fairbanks with fish wheels and dipnets. All chinook must be released alive. Some chinook still passing Pilot Station sonar.

**Fred West -ADFG Summer Season Research Biologist** - Tail end of projects ongoing - Bonnie explained chinook and summer chum transition in the lower river. As fish move up river we still

assess summer species upriver. Midpoint of the chinook run will pass eagle on July 28th. Passage rate is only larger than 2022, well below average. Projections indicate that we will be below 42500 average number, no US escapement goals met. Summer chum run will be near 280-900000 escapement goal estimate, will be within that goal. East fork Andreafsky, project started late. High water, weir structural issues. They have current season 189 chinook salmon, well below average. Chum well below average. High water in Pilot Station sonar, just redeployed sonar yesterday after taking it out. Estimates at 250000, but higher than that. Project delayed for high water -weir cumulative passage is 351 chinook, summer chum have seen 11000, well below average. Chena is at 839 salmon, seen a few chum. Salcha river - seen just over 1353. Seen a handful of chum. Eagle sonar- cumulative passage is 7059, 27566 is cumulative average, way below average.

**Bonnie Borba - Fall Season Research Biologist** - The fall chum salmon preseason run size projection based on the summer chum to fall chum salmon relationship is currently estimated to be 425,000 fish, while the average run size is over 900,000 fall chum salmon. Lower river projects have all switched to fall season operations, beginning July 16 for LYTF, July 18 for MVTF and July 19 for mainstem Yukon River sonar at Pilot Station. Genetic stock analysis will be used to determine how many fall chum salmon enter the river as well as provide stock assessment for the main components of three main stock groups 1) Teedriinjik/Sheenjek/Draanjik (upper Yukon U.S. stocks), 2) Canada stocks, and 3) Tanana River 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 up 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 inriver assessment monitoring projects to determine if escapement will be achieved for the drainagewide goal, as well as goals on the Teedriinjek and Canadian components (Fishing Branch River and Yukon River mainstem at Eagle). Backing up to the final summer genetics. The third stratum of chum salmon genetic samples from the Pilot Station sonar test fishery (from July 9 through July 18) is at the lab, at this time. The results should be out soon, look for them in the Yukon Daily update packet for those on that list serve. On average this stratum is typically 92% summer chum salmon. The age composition of 44 chum salmon sampled from the LYTF project for fall season, consists of 54% age-4 and 44% age-5 fish which compares to the 1983–2022 historical averages of 58% age-4 and 40% age-5. As of July 23, the percentage of female chum salmon is 40% which is below the average of 49%. The average length of 563 mm is below the historical average of 592 mm. Christy will cover management strategies for the fall season.

**Christy Gleason - Yukon River Fall Season Manager ADFG** - Quiet week - not much chum. In fall season, chum salmon come in a group about once a week. District 4 and subdistricts 5AB&C will see announcement. 425000 estimated chum. Allowing selective gear for first 10 days of fall season. Met summer season drainage wide escapement goal. Subsistence fishing for chum will close 10 days into the fall season. Fish counts will keep track and fishing schedule adjusted as needed.

**Holly Carroll, Yukon Area Manager US Fish and Wildlife** - Two years in a row fsb should take management action, if salmon fishing occurs, we should limit fishing to federally qualified users. Fsb wants to hear from fishermen how that affects fish. Managing fishery with fish and game. Has this helped fishing opportunity? Good to hear that the summer chum run is meeting people's needs. 907-351-3029

**Adam O'Dell, Biologist, Whitehorse** - Jaclyn is away today. Assessment update: In Whitehorse. DFO techs at eagle work with ADF&G and test fishery operations. Staff are in Old Crow for about a month. 352 chinook salmon counted at sonar, higher than 295 last year. Compared to an avg of 1900. Klondike sonar operated by Gwichin Nation - 127 chinook, compared to 114, average of 1420. Operating for about 3 weeks. On Pelly River. Big River sonar - 226 chinook as of July 22. 260 in 2021. Didn't happen in 2022. Average of 380 fish. Taijin Creek weir hopefully be running in near future. White horse rapids should provide numbers once salmon reach this part of the river. Porcupine -water is high but dropping. Water temperature is quite high, over 20C. Area around Old Crow, unseasonably high temps. Water levels on main stem are near average. Stewart and Pelly rivers are below average. Yukon is approaching 20c at the main stem.

**Jaclyn Kendall, Fishery Manager, Yukon River** - Current passage estimate to be low for Canadian origin, no change to management strategy, maximizing Canadian origin chinook. No harvest opportunities. Fishery remains closed. Canadian origin fall chum, harvest goals not met and will be closed. Fall drainage wide chum outlook has increased. Canadian origin component.

**Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council, Victor Lord** - Attending summit in Nenana

**Serena Fitka, Executive Director, YR DFA** - Educational Exchange program that is funded by the Yukon River Panel is completed. We had 7 representatives from Canada and we went to Anvik, Grayling, Holy Cross and Russian Mission. Our trip went very well with no hiccups and our communities went well. We will provide a detailed report that will be posted on our website and Facebook page. For some background on the educational exchange the program has been going on since 2001 and have had more than 90 participants. We look forward to going to Canada next year.

#### **Community level reports:**

##### **District Y1:**

**Alakanuk: Max Agayar** - I spoke with some fisherman, they are all done. Just trying to get dinner. One was trying to get fish near Nunam. Got some chum. Got a white nosed king. They are finally coming in. Everyone else is done fishing, only going to get dinner or lunch, waiting for the cohos.

**Kotlik: Marvin Okitkun** - Everyone here is done fishing for the summer, waiting for coho and fall chums. Only people going rod and reel for whitefish, no 4 inch nets out. Water temps are 10 1/2 degrees. Waiting for berries to ripen up. Water level is normal, middle mouth is a little high a few days ago. Higher than normal this time of year. Test fishery in Emmonak and Middle Mouth cancellations, lost livelihood, relying on subsistence, all the way up the river.

##### **District Y2:**

**Mt. Village: Nita Stevens** - Water is high here, hardly any drift. People cut down on fishing, waiting for silvers. Fall chum too. Waiting game for berries to ripen. Some are ripe, some are hard.

**St. Mary's: David 'Matty' Beans** - Water temp reading is 58.7 at Andreafsky. Not much people fishing here. Some whales swimming up mouth chasing humpys.

**Sven Paukan** - Most everyone done with summer chum fishing. Some people go out for chum, cold and cool summer, overcast, wet. Waiting for berries to come out.

**Pilot Station: Martin Kelly** - Water temp is fairly cool. Not very many families are fishing right now. Some families are waiting for fall chum and silvers for the freezer for winter. Water levels are back to normal. Considerably dropped since last report. Concern - some families getting into berry picking, experiencing mostly overcast and cooler weather, intermittent rain. Global warming, climate change, permafrost melt. Ph levels have changed compared to 20 years ago, gold mining programs and technologies have changed in the past years, much bigger and more extension. Create lagoons and ponds, eventual runoff. Most likely into the Yukon river. Different sediment reports, over the cutbank, concern with soil levels and higher toxicity levels. Numbers continue to drop -chinook- people concerned with food security. Puts people between a rock and a hard place. Talking about what affects the river, warmer climate.

**Marshall: Diane Fitka** - Nothing too new, everyone here is just getting done and putting away summer chum, waiting on the berries. Some hard and some soft. Couple fishing, one saw a whale, it got away.

### **District Y3:**

**Russian Mission: Basil Larsen** - Water is dropping and holding steady at fork, fish are at full swing. Water down compared to what it was, still kinda high. There were 5 fish camps subsistence fishing and harvesting. Smokehouses, all done now. A few people test fishing for fall chum. Full table of fish. Mud is sticky, not what we are used to. End of season final interview. Everyone was on the same page. Historically 10-12 fish camps, almost every one was wiped out this spring, a lot were the ones that got affected by the flood. People were stressed and hustling to get houses taken care of, rebuilding. Some too tired to fish and expecting low numbers that affected their mindset. Just trying to survive. Not a quarter of historical camps, ones that are operating are reduced numbers. 3-5 houses at a camp. 65 chum at my camp, 12 sheefish, 12 white fish, a lush, a humpy. Cut and processed, to distribute. Dried summer chum. Thankful but a struggle to get camp going. Final interview question that got consensus - fishing closures are devastating to culture, but need closures to protect fish during years of low abundance. Restricted endlessly on the Yukon, we all feel the closures should be on the high seas, we want federal managers to manage the life cycle, not just inriver. Federally recognized subsistence users rule is a double standard. We are already native. Can't help our families if we aren't living in the village. People come back home for moose hunting, berry picking, fishing. Fishing is the biggest subsistence, everyone helps each other, helping the elders. Parents who are too old, parents help and teach their kids. Subsistence lifestyle is a part of life. Hard to do that with that double standard. Every Yukon subsistence user wants the salmon back, nobody wants it more than us. Fix the trawling, we are not the problem. Tourists are floating on the river. Rubber boat and motor, meeting them here. Somebody saw a black bear and baby at the airport. YRDFA staff and 7 Canadians, 2 reporters came through Russian Mission through the Educational Exchange, got the chance to dipnet for the first time. Some from Whitehorse where the dam is. Headwaters. Got fried chum at the potluck, got to meet after the meeting and presentation. 3 boats for dipnetting. 2 chum and a whitefish taken to fish camp. Rebuilding process. Was used for subsistence harvest the traditional way. Wish we could have gotten kings. Locally bound Anvik chums, had fun.

**District Y4a,b,c:**

**Anvik: Ken Chase** - Not much about fishing. I've been traveling. Fishing is down. Misgivings about going out with gear. People are needing the fish but don't have a chance because of rules, regulations. Managers should get some sort of changes, a couple openings in the season. Frustration there. YRDFAs visit was great, Tanana Chiefs right after. Saw first hand regional director and Crystal Leonetti, an intern for UFWs saw the traditional ways of people fishing. Four of them, spent three days in Anvik. State representative there. Got to talk to a lot of people on concerns.

**Alberta Walker** - Not much to report, no one seems to be fishing. Some haven't started, hoping fall chum come soon. Some people haven't put their boat in the water yet. The weather and conditions are bad, some people planned to get fish elsewhere.

**Ruby: Rachael Kangas** - Nobody is fishing currently. When they did they were unsuccessful with gear selection, frustrating for the elders. Elders wanted to set a net, not able. Don't know about dipnetting. Gear is preventative. Success is a concern. Water is rising a little, drift in the river. Going sheefishing, usually get a lot at this time. No one was successful at the Melosi. Lots of pike but no one here eats pike.

**Huslia: Charlene Vent** - Not a whole lot of fishing, final report just in case, lots of people are traveling.

**District Y5abc&d:**

**Rapids: Stan Zuray** - Water levels are up slightly and there is some minor drift at present that is causing some 4" nets to be pulled out. No selective gear like dip nets etc. is being used by anyone as the "legal to keep" summer chum are so few and also 95% are in spawning condition. Constant checking of our main chum spawning creek in the area still shows not a single spawning bed or chum salmon seen for the last 3 years now. Very little fishing going on except the few nets in to feed the diminishing number of dogs and some daily fish to eat. Everyone now is hoping for a size fall chum run big enough to support an early season opening which would allow people to have their only chance for putting up some decent quantity of quality fish all season. Thank You.

**District Y6abc:**

**Nenana: Victor Lord** - Not much to report, Fish and game report in Chena - 839 chinook and in Salcha. Low numbers, glad I'm not fishing, not on the river a lot. Building a fish house on the river out of logs. Some activity going on upriver. Catching chum. Concerns about fish in spawning grounds, 839 if spawning grounds are ok, check the grounds.

**CANADA**

**Old Crow: William** - Water is normal, a little low, very hot for a while. No fishing. Local game guardians on the river talking and listening to people. Feeling it just like Russian Mission, food and gas prices went up. Mahsi.

**Dawson: Sebastian Jones** - Nothing much to report, no fishing. Weather is very hot. Quite smokey. People are getting ready for the salmon gathering and the first fish camp the first week of August.

**Additional Speaker:****Open Discussion / Questions:**

**Ken Chase** - Question for Fred and Holly - Presently in McGrath, not in Anvik at the moment. On the Anvik river, it was 47000 of summer chum, got another 2000, 52000 escapement, prorated is out is 16 days close to 100000 total? Can you clarify?

**Fred West** - Sonar on 10th, taken out and put in yesterday, 5000 counted. Post season interpolation for the missed days, estimated. 52000 will not be the final number.

**Ken Chase:** Fished one day with seine - high water on the Anvik river, and high on the Yukon, couldn't use the seine and 4 inch mesh, chums with big teeth mess up the net. Spawned out early, dark in color and small. Wasn't even worth fishing. Anvik people didn't do good on fishing because of the water situation. First part of season - people called around Grayling, fishing enforcement officer mentioned that people are fishing, people mentioned that ADF&G didn't want people to fish so that's why they weren't fishing. There wasn't information put out about subsistence fishing. Federal waters and other waters aren't very explainable to them, not informed. Need to emphasize that there wasn't enough time and information for people in that region.

**William, Old Crow** - How much chinook passed the old crow sonar today?

**Adam** - As of 23rd, we have had 352 chinook pass on the Porcupine.

**William** - Is it possible to set net for a little while for whitefish? And Coney?

**Adam** - Guidelines for set nets - differ. We only try to co-manage the salmon fishery aspect. Not many nets are in the water. Direct to Jeremy Brammer, wildlife and fishery manager. If you haven't found information yet, give me a call and I'll look into 8679759751 - (Canadian number?).

**Charlie Campbell, Tanana** - I'm glad people downriver were able to get some summer chum for subsistence and that the summer chum appear to be doing well. I just wanted to reiterate what has been said before, and that is that summer chum is customarily not used in our area because they are mostly close to spawning. The fall chum on the other hand are very important to subsistence in Tanana and above on the mainstem of the Yukon and we hope if the fall chum run is healthy fall chum management will give us the opportunity to fish for them, particularly the early fish that people like to put up for dry fish for themselves. Thank You.

**Bill Alstrom** - Just a comment - I haven't been actively fishing the past few years. Want to do subsistence fishing, but my smokehouse has been dormant. Good reports from Pilot Station and Russian Mission. Starting to think, we spent millions of dollars to solve this problem and going nowhere. Fish haven't come back like we expected. Bycatch and stuff on the ocean, we can't really put a finger on it. Someone mentioned gold mining. The Canadian side, gold rush, tears up a lot of the country up there. Flows into the Yukon. Critical to salmon habitat. Basil mentioned it earlier, we get a lot of restrictions. Nothing is working. Gear restrictions and full restrictions, nothing is working. What can we do if we tried everything else? Millions spent already. Test net sites, sonars. We should have started this way earlier. 70s and 80s. Start with ocean restrictions. Humans are to blame for what should and shouldn't be done. They aren't coming back. Not

happening anymore. Wondering if they will ever come back. High technology fishing out there. That's all, I just hope it gets better.

**Victor** - Echo what Bill was saying. Going to be a while before we get fishing again. Thoughts on what our problem is - Area M, talking to those people. 839 fish here is so poor. Don't want to give up on it yet. Keep on fighting it.

**Sven** - Question for Facebook Yukon counts on Pilot Station sonar - recently genetic fall chum number, what is it?

**Bonnie** - Not seen what was put on facebook, fall genetics have not been done yet. No value yet.

**Sven** - Who is posting this info? ADF&G? Genetic amount?

**Bonnie** - Could be the historical amount as of this date, estimate 19000. Anticipated to be fall chum. No genetics yet.

**Basil** - Getting pretty bad when bycatch numbers are exceeding the Eagle sonar, matching the Pilot Station sonar. Bycatch, look at their numbers, not only salmon genetically bound, but halibut, jellyfish, and other fish. Don't even know the effect of taking all that out of the ocean and the natural happening of things. Asking about that and how things roll at the whitehorse dam. They have to get local word and approval. Concerning bycatch numbers are matching ours and exceeding Canada.

**Sven** - We hear about bycatch all the time. Waste. If that happened to us we'd be come after right away. Wanton waste.

**Gabriel** - Bycatch last year or a couple years ago -a booklet - we need to fix the boats. Asked if this is a new thing. What fish are caught on these nets? Last year's booklet on Kwik'pak, new development got started last year about films and cameras on these big nets. Two different stories. Real truth and Kwik'pak fisheries and then people who work for the boats and catching bycatch. Need to get the truth. The world is changing and we are suffering more. Doing more of the same won't work.

**Virgil** - First page of Fairbanks News Miner -break weather records on temperature in Interior - 89 degrees, might break record today. Is anyone keeping track of the temperature in the river? Water absorbs heat.

**Bonnie** - We do have buoys in the Chena river year round, projects are taking temperatures. Salcha and Chena dam.

**Victor:** USGS was taking temperatures a few years back, but nothing now.

**Bonnie** - Not sure what numbers are being updated, on the local website. Should be on the database but not sure who's monitoring.

**Virgil** - USGS. Frustration with bycatch. Going to look at what scientists need to be studied on why fish aren't coming back, we are past the deadline to get on the advisory group. People are

wondering what is going on, productivity is not as good as it used to be. Hatchery fish - pinks and chums, competition. 20c a pound for these hatchery fish. We need to lead by example. They have destroyed the market in 1996, and destroyed our fish. Southeast Alaska harvest has 10x as much chum, destroyed chum pricing. On the BOF in Kodiak - get a report of metric tons of bycatch, how much is that really? Know how much I buy. Worked with me to calculate how tall the pile of fish would be - 97000 feet high, 40 foot square in '97. Massive fish waste. Board put restrictions on trawlers. Around Kodiak and State waters, hard on bottom trawling. Area M, Fairbanks AC put in a change request to readdress Area M fishery.

**Martin** - I've watched at least 8 feet per year total 25 feet at the camo, 3 /12-4 miles upriver from pilot. Dry rack 12 feet from the bank, fortunate enough to build a smokehouse 30 feet from the dry rack, working room. Warmer climate and heat stress and salmon floating down rivers, interior being warmer. Monitoring the water river temps. A degree or two to cause salmon to keel over. Pretty major factor, testing here in Pilot and propane stove, raising temps in the water, the fish keeled over. I've seen it, management don't know, the daily catch and photos online sockeye are huge. People online attest to it. Easily mistaken for jack kings. Management strategies don't work in our favor.

**Gail** - Respond to last comment - last day for nominations is tomorrow, NOAA has a salmon sub working group, sub group nominations due tomorrow. Need lower river representation. NOAA will take all names. We will be able to review online. Terrific comments and people to participate in this working group. Community based monitoring. Get your nominations in please.

NPFMC meeting in Anchorage, AK October 2-10.

THANK YOU!

*Call ended 2:57 pm*