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

Here is a summary of the 11th 2022 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, August 16, 2022. Call lasted 81 minutes. 44 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:**

Cordelia Kelly with Murkowski's office.

### **Communities participating:**

**Whitehorse**

**Allakaket**

**Holy Cross**

**St. Mary's**

**Alakanuk**

**Nunam Iqua**

### **Management Reports:**

#### **Andy Padilla - ADF&G Yukon River Area Assistant Research Biologist :**

The 2022 fall chum salmon run size is critically low. Genetic mixed stock analysis applied to the passage estimates at the Yukon River mainstem sonar near Pilot Station indicate 78,000 fall chum salmon are in the river as of August 14 (see figure below). The fall chum salmon run is near the historical midpoint. The projection based on inseason assessment projects indicates a run size well below 300,000 fish. The projection does not meet the threshold of 300,000 fish needed to allow subsistence fishing according to the Fall Chum Salmon Management Plan. In addition, the projection is unlikely to meet the drainage wide escapement goal of 300,000–600,000 fall chum salmon and tributary escapement goals. Therefore, subsistence and personal use fishing for fall chum salmon remains closed.

Coho salmon have started to arrive slightly later than average in all the Lower Yukon River assessment projects. The beginning of the coho salmon run is being counted at the Yukon River mainstem sonar near Pilot Station.

Passage is 13,000 fish as of August 14. The bulk of the run is expected to arrive mid to late August. The primary parent year for coho salmon this year is from the escapements of 2018. This year's coho run size is anticipated to be below average to average (average is 233,000 fish).

### **Fall Assessment Projects**

All projects that handle fish (fall season Lower Yukon Test Fishery, Mt. Village Test Fishery, Pilot Station, and Eagle sonar) are making efforts to reduce salmon mortality and distribute test fish catches to community members. Healthy salmon are released alive from the test nets. Injured salmon and mortalities are distributed to community members by Tribal councils or on a first come first-served basis from a public dock. Daily, cumulative, and historical data for most of the assessment projects listed in this section can be accessed online at [www.adfg.alaska.gov/yukonfishcounts](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/yukonfishcounts).

#### Lower Yukon River Cooperative Fall Drift Test Fishing / ADF&G, YDFDA

Fall season operations began on July 16 using 6-inch mesh gear to target fall chum and coho salmon. As of August 14, the fall chum salmon cumulative CPUE was 167.00, which is below the average of 880.76 for this date. The cumulative CPUE for coho salmon was 0.80, which is well below the median of 116.61. The mid-point of the coho salmon run is typically around August 19 at this project.

#### Mountain Village Drift Test Fishing / Asacarsarmiut Tribal Council

Fall season operations began on July 18. As of August 13, the fall chum salmon cumulative CPUE was 205.38, which is below the average of 1,199.77 for this date. The cumulative CPUE for coho salmon was 11.79, which is well below the median of 169.73. The first quarter point of the coho salmon run is typically around August 17 at this project.

#### Sonar Project near Pilot Station / ADF&G

The sonar project operated near Pilot Station transitioned to fall season counts on July 19. As of August 14, the cumulative passage is approximately 196,000 chum salmon. This compares to a median cumulative passage of 368,000 chum salmon for this date. The three-quarter point for chum salmon passing after July 18 is typically on August 19 for this project. Genetic stock proportions were applied to the sonar passage counts and resulted in an estimate of 78,000 fall chum salmon that have come into the river since July 19. The three-quarter point of the MSA fall chum salmon run at the mainstem sonar operated near Pilot Station typically occurs on August 20. As of August 14, the cumulative passage of coho salmon is approximately 13,000 fish, which is below the median of 19,000 fish through this date.

#### Teedriinjik (Chandalar) Sonar / USFWS

Sonar operations began August 8, but high water and technical issues delayed daily counts. Sonar counts on both banks began August 14 with a daily passage of 246 chum salmon.

#### Sheenjek River Sonar / ADF&G

Operations began on the historical date of August 8 and as of August 13, the fall chum salmon cumulative passage was 185, which is below the average of 852 for this date.

Eagle Sonar / ADF&G and Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)

This project will transition from counting Chinook to fall chum salmon later in August.

Porcupine River Sonar / Yukon Territory Canada / DFO

This project will transition from counting Chinook to fall chum salmon later in August.

Fishing Branch River Weir/Sonar / Yukon Territory Canada / DFO

This project will count fall chum salmon sometime in late August or early September.

**Christy Gleason - ADF&G Yukon River Area Fall Manager** - Still in the Emmonak office. Still waiting for the Salmon to arrive. Watching the fall chum very closely. At this point there are not enough fish to open fishing. We are past the historical midpoint and there are only about 80,000 fish in the river. I want to remind fishermen that it is really important to conserve our fall chum. I encourage you to put the gear where non-salmon is abundant so we can let the salmon pass to the spawning grounds.

**Holly Carroll - US Fish & Wildlife Service Yukon River Area Manager** - Unavailable this week.

**Fred West- ADF&G Yukon River Research Biologist** - Assuming late run timing, the chinook run at eagle is 99% complete. So we are about done there. It might be another week before we switch to fall chum. On the Salcha river, as of Aug 16 the passage was 1124, well below an average of 8000. For eagle sonar we are below the average. Aerial surveys took place on the 3rd and 5th. The estimates were well below average on the main stem, as we suspected.

**Deena Jallen- ADF&G Yukon River Area Summer Season Manager** - I don't have anything else to add for summer management.

**Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada**

**Oliver Baker - Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada Biologist:**

Gave numbers from the report. In the northern Yukon the chinook run is considered complete. Chums are being counted now. 349 Chinook past Old Crow. Chum 78 as of 2 days ago, increasing daily. This year's Chum run is expected to be very low, but should be higher than chinook. Moderate water levels, and are continuing to go down in the main stem. As we progress into fall the temperatures are declining.

**Jaelyn Kendall - Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada Fishery Manager:**

- The key priority for management in Canada is to ensure as many Canadian-origin salmon reach their spawning grounds as possible.
- With the very low Chinook abundance estimates observed at Eagle Sonar, which is located about 29 kilometers downstream from Alaska's border with Canada, spawning escapement objectives of 42,500 to 55,000 will not be met. There will not be an allocation to the First Nation subsistence fishery.
- The summer Chum run for 2022 looks to be the second lowest on record. Based on the summer/fall Chum relationship, fall Chum spawning escapement goals are unlikely to be met in Canada for the Yukon River mainstem or Fishing Branch stocks. It is not

anticipated that the season will start with an allocation to the First Nation subsistence fishery.

- Over the coming weeks, Fisheries and Oceans Canada will rely on information collected by assessment programs at Lower Yukon Test Fishery, Pilot Station Sonar and Eagle Sonar to inform management decisions in Canada.
- DFO will maintain closures in the Chinook and Chum public angling (recreational) commercial, and domestic (non-indigenous food fishery) fisheries throughout 2022.

### **Community level reports:**

#### **CANADA**

**Whitehorse:** Elizabeth MacDonald - Weird weather: hot and overcast, and then cool and then even some frost in the last week. Water is high. Water level has blown out a weir. Went to a fish ladder to see fish, but there was none to see. In Whitehorse the only way to see them is the fish ladder. It's been closed the last 2 years, so my younger daughter has never seen a Chinook. Our older daughter really loved going when it was open and was excited to go to see them. Hopefully next time we go we will be able to see a salmon.

#### **ALASKA**

**Allakaket:** Pollock Simon, Sr. - It's been wet. Water has a lot of debris. I have a 4" net in the slough. I am catching pike for my dogs. It's wet and rainy right now.

**Holy Cross:** David Walker - No one is fishing here. Water is holding steady. Little to no drift. I haven't been taking a temperature. How far down do you take the temperature for the fish. It's a lot warmer on the surface. Anyway, I talked to an elder about a week and a half ago. He was really frustrated about the fish. He appreciates the fish that was sent, but it doesn't taste like his fish he was born with. He is 96 years old. He doesn't feel good physically and spiritually, eating fish from other places. Everyone is moving on to different projects and looking forward to moose hunting. We think the fish they gave us is from last year. One person gave me 10 of them so I could cook them for mt dogs because she didn't think it was fit for her consumption. A lot of people that I talk to say that our fish come from and go through Area M, commercial. Subsistence is supposed to be a priority and it doesn't seem like it is anymore. I was watching a video earlier today. One elder said we have to stick together, and I thought about it. I think we will go down together. I think we need more loud voices out in the bering sea. We aren't doing any good closing ourselves off here. The problem is elsewhere. Thank you, look forward to a prosperous hunting season.

Connie Walker - This is my first time listening in. I had a moment in June where it really hit me; how difficult this is to go another year without going to the smoke house, without taking that time to put up fish for not only ourselves, but our friends, family and neighbors. That documentary that David talked about was way back in the 90s, they saw the change then. I never thought that it would ever be possible that we would be here with no fish in the smoke house. Now we are going on 3 years [without salmon]. How did the State help us? What did they do way back then, how did that help us? There is a difference in our villages without fishing. The life of the community is really being affected. People are turning to alcohol and drugs. I am really frustrated that it was allowed to come to this place when way back in the 90s that there was a difference in how the fish were coming back and all the regulations since then, nothing has

happened. What have we been given? Coupons to go to the store to buy processed fish sticks! I am just really frustrated!

Christy Gleason, ADFG - To answer David's temperature question: it varies, in Emmonak we are monitoring right next to the dock and at the middle mouth. I am not sure how far down it is, but it is fully submerged. The water seems to be pretty uniform at this time. During the summer season you might see some difference from the surface to the lower parts, but by now it is pretty uniform.

Serena Fitka, YRDEFA - Can you provide the name of the documentary?

David - I will send it to you on Facebook.

The fish swim 10-20 feet down. I don't know where the temperature is being taken and thinking that it's too warm for the fish. I think it should be taken 15-20 feet down. And then in the evening is when we see them fine, when it cools down.

Josh Clark, ADFG - I can talk more about the temperature loggers: We have them in Emmonak and at Pilot. The results may be interesting from this year. From prior years, you see day/evening changes at the surface. Down deeper it is consistent. Overall it is pretty even. It really depends on where in the river you are. Most of the Yukon is pretty evenly mixed. ½ meter deep on the loggers in the last couple of years. Some might be 2- meters deep, but we aren't going into the deep holes, and that is based on the research we've done where we just don't see fish in the holes. I suspect that the loggers at Ft. Yukon will show higher temperatures for this year. Stay tuned for those results.

John Lamont - I have a question for Christy. Number for Pilot Chum?

Christy Gleason, ADFG - Yes, 80,000 as of yesterday. Based on Sonar passage and applying genetics.

John - When you apply genetics you lose some? You are at 18,000 now?

Christy Gleason, ADFG - Yes, the first two weeks were summer chum.

John - There are more fish coming in now, correct? The test net isn't catching them for some reason. I was watching and they were just bouncing out.

Christy Gleason, ADFG - Correct. We have a standard way to run our nets so that we are consistent. Yes, we are seeing another group coming into the river as of Sunday evening. Based on our genetics, the first group was 85% summer chum. Our first pulse finished Sunday. We detected a second group and they are passing through Emmonak now. We are still really low and cannot open up fishing. We really need to let them pass to the spawning grounds.

John - I've also understood that the fall chum comes in about the 8th or 10th of August. I hope to see a minimum of 300,000 with this next group coming into Pilot next week. Once we hit that, will you relax a little?

Christy - Yes, once we get closer to the escapement goal, we will look at how many are bound for Canada, and then tributary goals. We will be looking to provide opportunities above that 300,000.

John - On another note, I really appreciate Mr. Walker for doing his presentation. I hear his frustration. I really appreciate his wife's statement. People are frustrated. I know people and managers know that. I don't know about the documentary in the 90s. That wasn't that long ago. In the 60's we had no problems with fishing. Then they started restricting us and we started seeing problems. People are frustrated, that's why they aren't at these meetings anymore.

Joseph Afcan - I saw most of the Tribal members at the airport yesterday to learn how to pass out the COVID money to people. A lot of people are in Anchorage. My question is, I said Mary Peltola was running for President but she is running for Congress. I misspoke. Along those lines, none of the Republicans were making commitments to save our salmon. The trawlers are destroying our salmon that are coming into our river. The trawlers need to be regulated so that they are not destroying our ecosystem and anything else that is interfering with our fishery. I can understand the frustration. People need to put up their fish so they can subsist on the resource. My main question to Fish and Game is when salmon are permitted to over escape (and make it to their spawning area), they get sick, What is the absolute minimum in terms of escapement, to allow the salmon to come back in numbers. Back in the day we were allowed to harvest as many fish as we could handle. I would like an absolute number.

Christy Gleason, ADFG - The drainage wide escapement goal is 300,000-600,000 fall chum. If we are within that level, the data tells us that the run will be sustainable. We also have tributary goals. That is why we are closed, because we are not expecting to meet those numbers. Looking back at the parent years, we had ~600,000 fall chum 4 year olds. That was about 70% of the run. We were really happy with that. We also had 1.7 million five year olds. That year we had commercial and subsistence open and we don't have the ability to harvest that many fish. Joseph - Do you have records back to when Ronald Ragnar? was the manager on the yukon delta. He managed it in a way that allowed us to keep fishing it and allowed us to fill our subsistence.

Christy Gleason, ADFG - Yes, I have gone back to 1970. I can look back at past management strategies and escapements. That is a routine thing that I look at.

Bill - Did you have a report from Saint Mary's? Nothing to report - just checking in.

Joseph Afcan - I hear people talking on this on a weekly basis. I see very little results, in my eyes, there has been really little progress. I'd like to see some results and get some fishing done in the summertime. To see more fish coming into the river. I hear people's frustrations. I'd like YR DFA to do a lot more so that life gets better on the Yukon. That's how frustrated I am.

Serena Fitka, YR DFA - I know you are frustrated. We are in year 3 or 4, so we will see what happens next year. The result that I see is people coming together from all of the communities along the river, voicing their opinions and concerns, so that people that do not live on the river can understand what is happening on the river. So I think we are making a lot of progress.

John - I was cut off commercially to fish king salmon. Now, parallel to what happened, the Canadians thought that we were screening the river. So they said why don't you close the river so we can get some fish on the spawning ground. I've testified about closing Area M. We have to make sure that escapement is made. Commercial fisheries should be closed if needed to provide subsistence for our people.

George Donat - I've been looking at the bottom trawl survey. Compared to last year it looks like there might be a cold pool beginning to build out there. I am wondering if any of the biologists know anything about that?

Christy Gleason, ADFG - Unfortunately, I am in-river, in-season, so I don't have any information on that. Our main person that is leading up the research is Katie Howard. You can call her directly, George.

John- Number of years ago, Dr. Crow from University of Washington. I think that was her name. She provided a report of the temperature of the Bering Sea. With warm water they come back earlier and smaller than when the temperature was cooler.

Serena - Two more calls for the season. Next week is a presentation with NOAA and the last call will have information on the Board of Fish process and important dates to look for this winter.

*Call ended at 2:21pm.*