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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 9th 2023 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, August 1st, 2023. Call lasted 73 minutes. 43 callers participated.

Background: Yukon River salmon management teleconferences are held annually every Tuesday in June, July, and August for managers and fishers throughout the Yukon River drainage to discuss fishing conditions and management strategies in real time as the salmon run is occurring. Funded by the Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

Media present:
KZPA Fort Yukon

Political Representatives participating:
Mike Wood, AK Board of Fish

Communities participating:
Alakanuk
Anvik
Huslia
Ruby
Tanana
Eagle
Old Crow

Management Reports:
Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Bonnie Borba, Research Biologist, ADF&G - Update on Fall season Assessment to date. 425,000 fall chum. Average over 900,000. Inseason assessment to determine if run size improves. Lower Yukon below average. Mountain Village's are average. End of July is mid point. Pilot Station transitioned to fall July 31. 82,000 chum salmon passed so far. Median date for first quarter point is July 31 at Sonar, halfway point is Aug 10. 3rd stratum - 90% summer chum. 59 lower yukon., 30 middle, 20 Tanana River. Some below average, some above average. Next group is heading to the lab now. Later this week, info on fall chum. 90 chum salmon sampled. 57% age 4; 40% age 5; 42% female, below historical average. Average length well below historical average. Fall chum drainage wide escapement goals 300,000- 600,000?

Tranjeekik, and Shenjek projects are transitioning. Eagle sonar will transition. Coho enters the river in mid August. Main stem sonar July 15 and July 27 caught first coho.

Fred West, ADFG Summer Season Research Biologist - Summer chum runs complete in lower river. $\frac{3}{4}$ point of chinook run at Eagle on Aug 3. Cumulative passage, well below average. And lower than in 2022. Lower end of IMEG, will not be met. Well below average. EFork Andreasfsky ended July 27. 194 Chinook salmon, below average 3,799. 2,308 summer chum, average is 52,000. They did start late and had issues with high water while weir was in place. So they missed a few days of counting.

Anvik - ended July 26, cumulative passage 52,578 well below average of ?

Giasasa is still counting -1259 Chinook - average is 2000 for this date.

Chena is at 980 chinook, well below average of 5,000 fish normal for this date.

Summer chum 363 is below average of 4,000 fish for this date.

Salcha they 1212 chinook which is well below average and chum salmon was well below average.

Eagle sonar - 10,183 cumulative well below average of 42,000.

Tracking a little better than last year but well below average.

Deena Jallen, Emmonak, ADFG Summer Season Manager of Yukon River - Areas you can use selective gear, remember King salmon run is very very low. Set 4 " or smaller mesh so you can help avoid king salmon. Increased water temps similar to 2019. Mitigated by average temps in much of the season. Seeing warmer water in the Interior.

Christy Gleason - Yukon River Fall Season Manager ADFG - Selective gear for chum salmon is closed in the Lower Yukon districts. After the closure occurred, a small group of fall chum salmon entered the Yukon River this past week. This group of fish looked like true fall chum salmon. These fish were bright silver and large compared to the earlier pulse of chum that physically looked like summer chum salmon that we saw at the transition of the summer to fall season in mid-July.

As we are getting close to the historical $\frac{1}{4}$ point of the fall chum run, we're still expecting a low fall chum salmon run this season. We haven't seen any groups of coho salmon yet, but it's still early for them. If you do catch coho salmon while subsistence fishing, you are allowed to keep them. Fall season management has been announced through District 4. District 4 can continue to use selective gear for chum salmon until their closure dates this week. Subdistricts 5ABC can expect to see a fall season announcement come out tomorrow.

The fall chum preseason projection is 425,000, which is above the drainagewide escapement goal of 300,000-600,000, so we allowed the continuation of selective gear for chum salmon for the first 10 days of the fall season knowing that the majority of the chum entering the river are still summer chum. The Canadian fall chum portion of the population has been weaker than expected the last couple years. That's why subsistence fishing for chum salmon will be closing with selective gear. We need to let more fish come into the river to see if there's enough fall chum salmon to allow for subsistence harvest.

Holly Carroll Yukon River Subsistence Fishery Manager, USFWS - Nothing to add.

Jaclyn Kendall, Fishery Manager, Yukon River Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada - Forecast of Canadian origin fish will guide management. Stock Assessment:DFO

technicians continue to be on site at the Eagle sonar in Alaska where we're working with ADF&G on the sonars and test fishing operations. Canadian origin Chinook continue to pass the site and fall chum should be moving through in the next weeks. Our camp on the Porcupine River, near Old Crow has been running since June 28th. As of July 30, there have been 497 Chinook salmon estimated to have passed the sonars, compared with 335 on this date last year and the project average (2014 – 2022) of 2,238. The Klondike River sonar which is operated by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in at Dawson City has detected and estimated 167 Chinook salmon as of July 31, compared to 175 on this date last year and the average of 584 (2010 – 11, 2020 – 22). Pelly River sonar which is operated in partnership with Selkirk First Nation has been running since July 6 and an estimated 960 Chinook salmon have passed the site as of July 31. This project last ran in 2021, when the year to date passage was 2,837, compared with the project average of 4,251 (2016-21). The Big Salmon River Sonar has been running since July 14, and an estimated 624 Chinook have passed as of July 29. This project last ran in 2021, when the year to date passage was 657, compared with the 10 year average of 1,561. Starting this year, Teslin Tlingit Council has a sonar operation on the Nisutlin River. The Nisutlin River is near the community of Teslin, Yukon and is part of the Teslin River watershed. The project has been running since July 16 and an estimated 185 Chinook have passed as of July 30. On July 31, the first Chinook of the 2023 season was observed passing the ladder at the Whitehorse Rapids Fishway. In 2022, the first Chinook was observed on August 2 and the cumulative passage for the season was a 50-year low of 165 Chinook. Environmental Conditions: Air temperatures around much of Yukon remain high and an increased amount of lightning activity has started many new wildfires in the territory. Fires near Old Crow have necessitated the community to be on evacuation alert, in preparation for the potential that fire(s) move closer to town. The water temperature in the Porcupine River remains high, and has been consistently above 20 C with a high this week of 22 C. Water temperatures in Yukon River tributaries have varied from 12 C in the Klondike River to 20 C in the Pelly River, with Nisutlin and Big Salmon rivers near 15-18 C. Water levels are near normal in most systems for this time of year with Kluane Lake, Pelly River and Teslin Lake all below average.

Adam O'Dell, Biologist, Whitehorse Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada - Staff on site at Eagle Sonar. Canadian Origin chinook continue to pass the site. Porcupine River - running since June 28th. As of July 30 - 497 chinook, 335 last year. Project average is 2200. Fall chum should be coming soon. Other updates on First Nation reports - Klondike river sonar - 167 Chinook July 31, 135 last year, average 584. Pelly River - since July 6 - 960 Chinook as of July 31. In 2021, they got 2800 Chinook. Project average 4200. Big Salmon River sonar - 624 as of July 29. In 2021 they got 657 as of this date. 10- year average 1500 fish. Teslin Tlingit Council - 185 Chinook as of July 30. July 31 -first chinook passed Whitehorse Rapids Fish ladder. Last year the first Chinook was Aug 2. Last year 155 chinook. Environmental update - air temps high. lightning , wildfires. Old Crow is on Evacuation alert. Pretty smoky, warm and scary situation. Water temp in Porcupine is high . 22 C. Water temps in Yukon territory have varied.

Shannon Erhart, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission - Charlie Wright is out on the river looking for mid river sonar sites. Staff is working with BLM to dismantle the Giasias weir.

Community level reports:

District Y1:

Alakanuk: Max Agayar - Everyone is starting to summer fish and berry picking. The ones going fishing are just getting enough for dinner. They are done with summer fish and they are waiting for the fall fish.

District Y4a,b,c:

Anvik: Ken Chase - Here in Anvik, missed most of the reports. No fishing going on. I was in McGrath for a week.

Ruby: Rachael Kangas - One person fishing. It was really a struggle for them. Managed to get 11 summer chum but they were in pretty bad shape. Only family currently fishing. Everyone is waiting for the fall chum fishing to open. Hopefully they can open so people can get fish in their smoke houses. Water levels are stable. No debris. Been pretty warm here. A lot of the fish they caught were spawned out.

Huslia: Charlene Vent - We haven't been fishing this past week. There are a lot of people traveling and personal reasons.

District Y5abc&d:

Rapids: Stan Zuray - Water levels are up slightly and there is still some minor drift at present that was causing some 4" nets problems. Of note is the continued regulation allowing for net float lines to be sunk to avoid drift that was passed by the Board of Fisheries last winter is being used by some fishermen at this time. Extra main floats are used on these nets to keep them visible. No selective gear like dip nets etc are being used by anyone as the "legal to keep" summer chum are so few and also 95% are in spawning condition. Have had 3 camps close up since last week. Everyone is still 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.

Eagle: Ruby Becker - Spoke to some community members this week. Only a couple of people have tried with their 4" nets. Little success for pike. Boat ramp is in poor repair. We had a substantial flood this spring. Since then no one wants to do anything with the boat ramp. It would be very hard to get a boat in the river if they wanted to. Water level is fluctuating but going down. Extreme heat - 90 degrees. Going down now. Powerful lightning storms. Smoky here. Spoke to a resident this week in Eagle. They gave their fish wheel away for scraps.

Yukon River Bridge: Jeffery - We see a lot less drift than we had last week. A couple of families have been fishing. Very very hot here and high water.

CANADA

Elizabeth MacDonald, Council of Yukon First Nations - I am in the field, and wanted to send an update. I am currently at Selkirk First Nation's sonar on the Pelly River. Last week I was down south for a wedding so I don't have much to report other than there have been lots of thunder and lightning in the evenings with wind and then hot during the day. No Chinook were seen at the ladder when I last checked but they should be there any day now. On the drive to Pelly we checked the water temperature at Carmacks (Yukon River) and the water was 19/20C (66/68F). Here at Pelly the water is now 20C. Lethal temperature is considered to be about 21C for Chinook. The run is about 50% over at this location. Last count was 882. Peak count was around 110 in a day. In 2016 the peak count was almost 350.

Old Crow: Stan - A lot of smoke and west wind. We are under evacuation notice. Lightning strikes. Some are brush and ground fire north of Old Crow. New for this area. Temps are high in the river. The river is at the lowest point for this season. Low for this time of year. One more fish I counted so 500 fish have passed the sonar on Porcupine river. Not a bad run size for Old Crow. Following our conservation rules and not fishing for salmon. There is going to be an opening in a couple of weeks when the salmon get here. Been a hot summer here. We will see what happens in the next week or so with the fires. We are busy.

Open Discussion / Questions:

Jude Hensler - Nushagak chinook run is considered a stock of concern. Is the Yukon a stock of Concern?

Fred West, ADFG Summer Season Research Biologist - Yes, Yukon River Chinook is a stock of concern.

Deena Jallen, Emmonak, ADFG Summer Season Manager of Yukon River - Actually a Yield concern. [read definition].

Chuck Brazil, Regional Management Coordinator - It has been a stock of concern since the early 2000s. Means we need a strong management and action plan to meet the escapement goal. It will continue to be that way through the next board cycle.

Jude Hensler - Last week people were complaining about what we are doing doesn't seem to be working. What do we do when there is a stock of yield concerned? What physically is done. Besides the absences of fishing.

Chuck Brazil, Regional Management Coordinator - Board gives us that freedom to open and close fishing. Deena has been managing in - season . We have been taking those actions and we will next year too.

Jude Hensler - Asked a question to Adam about Chinook spawning grounds.

Adam O'Dell - Presently there is not anything that takes place at a recurring rate. (Don't know what the question was). Part of our plans is to do aerial surveys, it is a very large system. There is a lot of ground in the area that is not covered. They are trying to pinpoint the spawning grounds.

Stan (Old Crow) - On the Porcupine and the upper Porcupine, we have done some research and identified my river for spawning for Chinook and the Minor river. Did some radio tags. It would be interesting to do some radio tags to see if there is consistency of spawning. Water is very warm right now. Considering that 500 has come up past the sonar, that is a pretty good run. And if they can do it in the warm temps, that are some pretty healthy salmon.

Jude Hensler - When he said Red Salmon, that's the term for the cohos, they are red when they get up that far.

Gale Vick, BBAYK Coalition - Fairbanks AC - to Chuck - to Jude's question on stock of concern. Before the Bristol Bay Board meeting, the Nushagak had a preparatory question for the BOF. Do we actually have an action plan for the Yukon River Chinook?

Chuck Brazil, Regional Management Coordinator - We originally put in an Action Plan when the Yukon River Chinook first became a stock of concern. But we already had a well developed management plan and that is the plan that we have been following.

Gale Vick, BBAYK Coalition - Thank you, I want to applaud the dept for doing that. It would be helpful if the public could see an actual plan. Is that possible?

Chuck Brazil, Regional Management Coordinator - I will take that into consideration.

David Walker - I see the summer chum is a lot better than it was but not the historical cumulative passage. In years, I learned that the fall chum usually follows suit with the summer chum in strength. My question is, with the reports, past Pilot Station there are no cumulative passage numbers. Would it be a problem to plug those numbers in for the historical run? For example on July 18 there were 58,000 chinook and historically 140,000. Same for summer chum. Why don't they have the historical numbers for the fall chum?

Bonnie Borba, Research Biologist, ADF&G - People that get the daily update packets have the historical numbers. The facebook one may not have it on there. Sometimes we can't fit all of the information on facebook.

David Walker - The links don't have a problem listing it throughout the summer. But the fall chum doesn't reflect it.

Bonnie Borba, Research Biologist, ADF&G - We will look at it.

David Walker - no fishing here. The water is holding its own. We are getting warm weather.. 3 weeks ago the Exchange program came through and we really enjoyed the guests from Canada. It's good to hear each other's concerns. I'd like to see that communication open. It breaks barriers and false information for everyone up and down the river.

Jeffery, Yukon River Bridge - Would ADFG find it helpful if samples of fish being harvested were sampled? Hearts, heads? Anything that is not being kept.

Deena Jallen, Emmonak, ADFG Summer Season Manager of Yukon River - If you are thinking about looking for disease, it probably won't work because of the sampling protocol.

Fred West, ADFG Summer Season Research Biologist- Deena covered it. It does take specific timing. Genetics have specific ways to get it. You'd need a specific kit. There is something to talk about possibly in the future.

THANK YOU!

Call ended 2:13 pm