

# Yukon Fisheries News

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

FALL 2017

## A Look Back on the 2017 Summer Season

BY HOLLY CARROLL, ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME (ADF&G)  
SUMMER SEASON AREA MANAGER

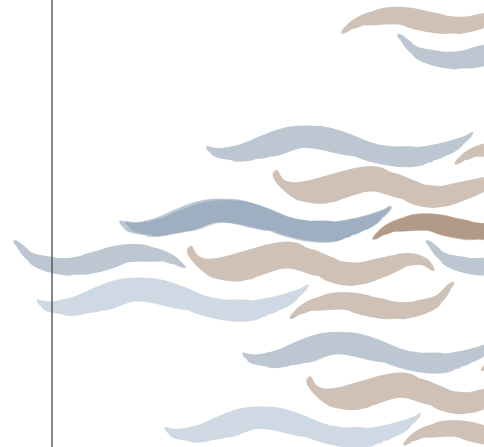
When I wrote this letter in early September, salmon were still passing through the Yukon River, mostly fall chum and Coho salmon. A few Chinook salmon may have been passing the border, still making their way to the far reaches of their spawning grounds on the Pelly or Teslin rivers or smaller streams in Canada and the harvest of Chinook and summer chum salmon in Alaska would have just completed. The research and management biologists at Fish and Game are beginning to finalize, analyze, and summarize the season's data for the winter meetings and annual reporting, and it is a great time to reflect on how the season went.

The 2017 season started out as a hopeful one, with a conservative run size forecast of 140,000-195,000 Chinook salmon. We also had the forecast from the juvenile research in the Bering Sea, which has been quite accurate the last few years, and predicted that the upper end of the total Chinook run could be as high as 268,000 fish. As it turned out, this was the more accurate forecast and was within the confidence interval (range) of what was counted at the Pilot Station sonar project. Inseason, the management team acted quickly to reduce restrictions and allow King-directed subsistence openings on the regulatory "windows" schedule in all districts once assessment projects and fishing reports indicated the run was strong. In fact, the 2017 Chinook run is the largest run since 2003. After the early closures and restrictions on the first pulse in Districts 1 through 4 were lifted, many fishermen reported on the Tuesday YRDFA calls that they were meeting their needs for King and summer chum salmon.

The summer chum salmon run was also very strong, which was predicted to be over 2 million fish and then coming in at over 3 million fish! Many people reported meeting their subsistence needs for that species and commercial fishing started conservatively with dipnets and beach seines but eventually went to gillnets with 6 inches or smaller mesh. District 4 also saw the return of a commercial summer chum market, for the first time since 2014. Unfortunately, buying capacity was limited in District 2 and many fishermen, particularly those from communities further up the district, did not have a market for summer

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Protecting and  
promoting all healthy  
wild fisheries and  
cultures along the  
Yukon River drainage.



continued on page 4

# Yukon River Region Calendar

September 26-28, 2017  
**AVCP Annual Convention**  
Bethel

October 10-11, 2017  
**Western Interior Subsistence  
Regional Advisory Council (RAC)**  
Fairbanks

October 12-13, 2017  
**YK Delta Subsistence RAC**  
Bethel

October 28-29, 2017  
**GZGTG Annual Meeting**  
Fort Yukon

October 29-31  
**Alaska Federation of Natives**  
Anchorage

November 8-9, 2017  
**Eastern Interior  
Subsistence RAC**  
Tok

November 14-17, 2017  
**Alaska Tribal Conference  
on Environmental  
Management (ATCEM)**  
Anchorage

December 11-13, 2017  
**Yukon River Panel;  
Semi-Annual Meeting**  
Whitehorse, YT

January 2018  
**Federal Subsistence  
Board Meeting**  
Anchorage

February 12-16, 2018  
**Alaska Forum on the  
Environment**  
Anchorage

March 2018  
**TCC Annual Convention**  
Location TBD



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# Message from the Director



WAYNE JENKINS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings everyone! Finally, we are back in the newsletter business, and what you hold in your hands or are viewing on your favorite digital device, is the first edition of the **Yukon Fisheries News** since the Spring of 2014 edition. We are pleased to be able to respond to the often repeated question and request, "When will you be able to bring back the newsletter?", from our Board of Directors, YRDFA members, and others along the river. Here it is, using a similar layout but in color and bringing you information, stories, and reports from river communities on fishing, traditional culture, and other topics important to your communities, fisheries management data for navigating the evolving regulatory guidance, and other materials pertinent to the long-term health and sustainability of life on the river.

There is a lot going on that we'd like to share with you. The Education Exchange, funded by the Yukon River Panel, is back after a one-year break with a bit of a twist. This year's trip to Canada was planned and implemented through a cooperative partnering between YRDFA and the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee which works with the Yukon River Panel, the Yukon River associated First Nations, and the Department of Fisheries & Oceans (DFO) Canada. This long-standing program is meant to build understanding,

connectivity and long-term conservation partnering between Alaskan and Canadian Yukon River communities and the feedback from participants from both sides of the border testify to the Exchange's deep value in these areas. An experience not to be missed, see the story on the next page!

The YRDFA In-Season Teleconferences, funded by the US Dept. of Interior's Office of Subsistence Management, wrapped up at the end of August. There was a lower number of call-ins this year, likely due to the increased opportunity and time needed to harvest and process King salmon. Although call-ins were low, those involved indicated the teleconferences' value in giving fishers the opportunity to respond to management decisions and inform fishery managers about their harvest successes, fishing challenges and questions concerning fishing regulations. There is nothing else like these calls on the river and we invite more fishers, young and old, to join in next year when the Teleconference calls resume in early June.

The big news this fishing season is of course the surprising size of the returning King salmon run. It appears from the YRDFA teleconferences that most, if not all, Alaska Yukon River communities met their subsistence harvest needs this summer, being able to harvest Chinook salmon of good quality along with salmon from strong summer and fall chum runs. Commercial harvest of these two species were also exceptional. It has been a long time since people on the river have had such a good fishing year while also going beyond the important Canadian border escapement goal. Congratulations are in order for all those who made the sacrifices over the long conservation period that resulted in meeting the all-impor-

tant escapement goals necessary for maintaining and hopefully improving the King salmon runs over time. This year's strong Chinook return raises many questions. Is this year's run an indication of an improved trend in run strength? Can we expect a good run next year? How much longer do we need to be in conservation mode? And how are our neighboring Yukon River fishers and communities in Canada doing? These questions, and others are likely on the minds of many along the Yukon River and we will be exploring and hopefully finding answers to share with you through the new Newsletter and at the Pre-season Salmon Fishery Preparation meeting this coming spring.

Lastly, we have a favor to ask. YRDFA's mission is to, **provide a collective voice for the people of the Yukon River to ensure the long-term sustainability of the river, its cultures and economies by promoting healthy, wild salmon fisheries on the Yukon River.** This means your voice, your input around traditional culture, community, and subsistence and commercial fisheries harvest, is important and we want to share it with others on the river. Only together can we care for the river so it can provide for all Yukon River communities and families.

Let us know what you are thinking, your questions around our complex fishery, stories, and concerns from your part of the river. Feel free to contact Danielle Stickman at [danielle@yukonsalmon.org](mailto:danielle@yukonsalmon.org), 907-726-3333 or 1-877-999-8566 #5 with story ideas or questions. 🐟



*Newly constructed fish wheel in Nulato intended for the summer chum commercial fishery.*

### **A Look Back...** *continued from front pg*

chum and many reported financial hardships and some even had to move out of town for work. Commercial fishing for summer chum, in many communities, is often the main source of income. Its what locals depend on to pay for their subsistence activities. A new buyer did begin operation in St. Mary's, with limited capacity, but not until the Fall season began.

Typically, the Fall season begins on July 16 when the Fall area manager takes over in Emmonak. By that date, the management of fall chum and Coho salmon is the focus, as most of the Chinook salmon run is complete in the lower river and the summer chum run is dwindling while fresh fall chum are starting to enter the river. A department decision early in the fall season that caused much controversy was the sale of incidentally-caught Chinook salmon during commercial chum gill-net openings. The rationale from a biological standpoint was this: the King salmon run was 99% complete and the likely harvest of Chinook salmon in the fall chum salmon fishery at that time of the run would be less than 500 fish, or less than a fraction of a percent of the total run. Numbers this small would not have an effect on the ability for fishermen upriver to meet their subsistence King salmon needs, and it would have no effect on the escapement to spawning grounds. Furthermore, many fishermen in the lower river had met their needs for King salmon, so finding subsistence uses for them after

commercial openings was becoming difficult. To sell Chinook salmon and make a few hundred dollars would be a small boost to each fisherman's earnings. They would not be able to target Chinook salmon because the mesh was limited to 6 inches and the abundance of chum salmon was so incredibly high that the nets were saturated with chum salmon.

However, thanks to the YRDFA teleconference and people speaking out at meetings in their communities, it became apparent that many people throughout the drainage were frustrated by this decision. They felt caught off-guard, and that it undermined the subsistence fishing sacrifices they'd made this season and in the many previous years when the King runs have been poor. It was important for the department to hear so many voices on that call and in those meetings. As managers, we often are limited to hearing from people that call us directly. Through the YRDFA teleconferences, managers got to hear from nearly every community on the river, if they choose to be on the call. The YRDFA calls provide everyone participating with varied perspectives, fish catch information, weather and river conditions and it truly assists fishery management. In this case, it led the department to review their decision, revisit the regulatory language that guides management of commercial fisheries, and ultimately continue to prohibit the sale of incidentally-caught Chinook salmon until further guidance from the Board of Fisheries

can be provided. Feedback from the public is important, and while the decisions we make are based on biology and the regulatory framework provided to us, the trust of the public is vital to what we do and helps to guide our work every day.

While controversy will always exist with fisheries as dynamic as those on the Yukon River, it is heartening how united everyone is on this river in the goal of re-building the salmon run and preserving it for future generations. And the 2017 summer runs were incredibly strong! In addition to Chinook subsistence harvests that may be close to historical averages, we have seen over 73,000 Chinook salmon counted near the border at the Eagle sonar project, and nearly 50% of those fish are older females! Though this year's run size didn't quite reach the 300,000 fish runs we had in the early 90's, the work of the fishermen and the department to reduce harvests and meet escapement goals is working. As we enjoy and share the bounty from fish camps this year, hopefully we will be reminded that all of our sacrifices and efforts are paying off! 🐟



*Josh Cadzow holds up his catch from a subsistence fish wheel in Fort Yukon.*



*ADF&G Summer Season Manager, Holly Carroll, learns from a master, Shirley Clark, in a Grayling fish camp.*

# 2017 Salmon Know No Borders—Yukon River Exchange

BY DANIELLE STICKMAN, YRDFA COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH DIRECTOR

This project was designed as a way for people who live on both sides of the US/Canada border to increase their understanding of their neighbors' experiences and challenges as they relate to Yukon River salmon fisheries and more. This is an account of one participant's experience on the Exchange.

Five of us Alaskans went to Yukon, Canada for 7 days, from July 30-August 6, 2017. Our group consisted of Peter Tyson (St. Mary's), Sven Paukan (St. Mary's), Katelyn Zuray (Tanana), Fred West (ADF&G Summer Season Biologist), and myself.

## DAY 1: To Dawson City

We hopped in a van to head up to Dawson with Carl Sidney, our driver and prior Teslin Tlingit Council Chief, who is a wealth of knowledge and shared his Educational Exchange experience with us. The organizers of the trip were Jesse Trerice, Executive Director of the Yukon Salmon-Subcommittee, and Steve Gotch, Co-Chair of the Yukon River Panel and Department of Fisheries & Oceans Employee. Our first stop was at Fox Creek, a tributary off of the Yukon River, where the Ta'an Kwach'an Council are working with Fish and Wildlife Program Coordinator, Deb Fulmer, on a Chinook Salmon Restoration Project. They

just finished their 6th year of work, which includes reintroducing fry into the Fox Creek (~33,000 were released in 2017!), re-routing channels from erosion, and trapping beavers.

We continued our drive, stopping at Braeburn Lodge (for a cinnamon roll the size of our face!), Carmacks, and Five Finger Rapids before arriving in Dawson where we had dinner and a talking circle with Tr'ondek Hwech'in community members. Chief Joseph gave a presentation on their culture camps and talked about her Education Exchange experience some years ago to Saint Mary's. They use Chinook for 2 feasts; Youth Feast for their First Harvest and at their Annual General Assembly. Someone stated that "Salmon feed our spirit and our souls" which is one of the main reasons they are in conservation mode, to revive the salmon population, to feed their children's children, and continue their cultural traditions. The rest of the evening was full of fish camp stories, differences between processing fish, and what salmon means to each of our cultures.

## DAY 2: Fish Wheel and Moosehide Tours

We did a morning tour with Fishwheel Charter Services, run by Dawn Kasoun

and Tommy Taylor, and checked out the only fish wheel in the Yukon Territory. We learned about the history of the Dawson area, Tommy's family, environmental changes, and ended the tour with fried bread and tea--Yum! That afternoon we went to Moosehide which is where the Tr'ondek Hwech'in hold their culture camps.

## DAY 3: Back Down South and Up the River We Go!

After coffee at 7am, we headed back south to Whitehorse. Our first stop was at the Klondike River to see some strong King salmon swimming up to their spawning grounds!

Our 2nd stop was to visit the Selkirk First Nation (SFN) at Pelly Crossing and met with Roger Alfred (Yukon River Panel Advisory Council), Eugene Alfred (Carver & Fish and Wildlife officer for SFN), and a few others. Eugene gave a presentation on their Pelly River Salmon Management Plan. SFN is self-governing with the ability and responsibilities over lands, resources, and future development, which is fascinating. They have a sonar station that monitors part of the Pelly River and updates are shared on their website and a "live" TV shows the sonar in the community store. Their plan and monitoring project is very interesting and they're working to conserve salmon and keep their tradition and culture alive. \* [www.selkirkfn.com](http://www.selkirkfn.com)

The 3rd stop was at Tatchun Creek, with Al Von Finster, where beaver dams are being monitored to keep a clear fish passage. We continued on to Carmacks to meet with Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation fishers and met with a 98-year old woman who still cuts fish with her daughter who is 81!

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Tr'ondek Hwech'in community members and Educational Exchange participants in Dawson.



98-yr-old woman's salmon alongside her 81-yr-old-daughter's salmon; separated with ribbons in Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation fish camp.

**DAY 4: Fish Ladder, Hatchery, and Canadian Salmon Management**

Our entourage headed out on a Fish Ladder Tour which is the longest fish ladder in the world! In addition to the fish ladder monitoring, staff also tag a selected number of King salmon traveling through; we got to watch one male Chinook be tagged and released back into the ladder.

Did you know that when salmon transition from fresh to saltwater--the stress of that event leaves marks on their bones? Or that Chinook females can lay 5-6,000 eggs and only one may survive? Or that fishers around Whitehorse cannot use fish wheels because the salmon can see the nets or wheel due to the clear blue water? Or did you know that people used to make large salmon racks with a roof and then leave their fall chum hanging up in the winter? Can you imagine being able to walk outside in the middle of winter and just grab a fish to cook up?! I didn't know all of those things! If you're ever in Whitehorse in the summer, pay a visit to the Fish Ladder at Whitehorse Dam for a tour.

We also checked out 1 of the 2 fish hatcheries in the Yukon Territory and visited the Department of Fisheries and Oceans offices. We met with Mary Ellen Jarvis (Resource Manager of Treaties and Fisheries for DFO), Joel Harding (Senior Stock Assessment biologist), Vesta Mayther (Stock Assessment Biologist), Harvey Jessup (Yukon River Panel Member), and

Steve Gotch. We learned about the Canadian-Origin Yukon River Salmon distribution, assessment, fisheries, management, and projects.

That afternoon we left Whitehorse to head to Teslin. Deadman Creek is a site where the Teslin Tlingit Council along with an environmental organization are conducting a Juvenile Restoration Project. This is the project's second year of doing the in-stream incubation project. It was a great site and interesting project.

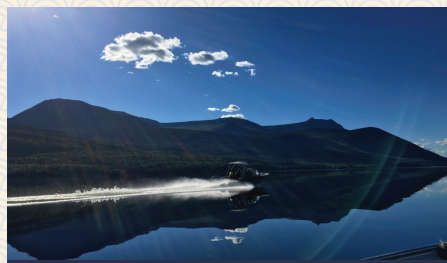


Juvenile Chinook at the Deadman Creek Juvenile Restoration Project Site.

To find out more about the projects mentioned above, please visit [www.yukonriverpanel.com](http://www.yukonriverpanel.com).

**DAY 5: Boat Ride**

This day was one of my favorite parts of the trip. We were out on the Teslin Lake, which is 78 miles long, and we journeyed all the way to the head where our boats couldn't go any further. Connecting with nature and people was a great reminder of why we were on the trip and why the work we do on the Yukon River is so important.



Teslin Lake Boat Ride.

**DAY 6: Last Day**

On the final day, we went to the Teslin Tlingit Council Heritage Center, the George Johnston Museum, Carcross for lunch, Carcross desert (yes, there's a desert in Canada!), Emerald Lake, and back to Whitehorse to catch our flight the next day.

There is so much more to say about the Educational Exchange Trip but first and foremost I would like to thank the Yukon Salmon Subcommittee, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Carl Sidney, Tr'ondek Hwechin, Selkirk First Nation, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, Whitehorse Rapids Fish Hatchery, Teslin Tlingit Council, YRDFA, the participants, and others I did not mention. Many thanks for an unforgettable experience!



R to L: Jesse Trerice, Fred West, Sven Paukan, Peter Tyson, Katlyn Zuray, Al Von Finster, Danielle Stickman.

**Participant Comments**

Peter Tyson

*"I never thought that the salmon in Alaska went all the way to Yukon, Canada. I didn't think about salmon once they go past Alaska boundaries. It was a good experience, I learned a lot; very good experience and very educational."*

Sven Paukan

*"I enjoyed the Educational Exchange very much, it was informative and we got to meet some very wonderful people. I would definitely encourage participation in this program from the Alaskan side. You get a better understanding of the salmon from where they begin their journey at the headwaters, and see how similar all peoples along the entire Yukon River rely on this incredible resource. I would also recommend a taste of the poutine."*

Katlyn Zuray

*"During my Educational Exchange in Yukon, Canada I learned people want friendly cooperation, I truly felt they want to grow a strong relationship with the rest of the Yukon River Fishermen in Alaska for the health of the salmon and lifestyle. They were very willing to teach us about their lifestyles and communities. As a fisherman on the Yukon River I will always keep our upper river neighbors and the health of the salmon run in mind." 🐟*

# YRDFA Completes 13<sup>th</sup> Year of In-Season Salmon Survey with Yukon River Fishers

BY CATHERINE MONCRIEFF, YRDFA ANTHROPOLOGIST

For 13 years, YRDFA has been training and supporting local hires in 10 villages along the Yukon River to survey fishers about their successes and challenges during the King salmon fishing season. The surveyors work for 6 weeks while the King salmon swim through their villages. They collect important in-season information from fishers, reporting to YRDFA and to the river at large through the weekly In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences. This program provides an opportunity for managers to hear from fishers about how the fishing season is going for them and for fishers to voice their concerns and challenges about in-season fishery management.

For the 2017 summer fishing season, we hired surveyors in the communities of Alakanuk, Mountain Village, Marshall, Russian Mission, Anvik, Ruby, Huslia, Tanana, Fort Yukon and Eagle. Our local hires were Pamela Cook, Eugene Landlord, Norma Evan, Basil Larsen, Sherry Kruger, Jonathan Nicoli, Lisa Bifelt, Geneva Wright, Andrew Firmin and Naomi Helmer.

To kick off the season, our surveyors traveled to Fairbanks in April to attend the Yukon River Pre-Season Salmon Fishery Preparation meeting and the Surveyor Training event. In addition to the training, they each received a binder with all the materials necessary for the work. A full evening was spent reviewing the materials, answering questions, and practicing conducting the survey.

Nine of our community surveyors successfully interviewed fishers in their communities for 6 weeks during the Chinook salmon season and called in to the Teleconferences weekly with reports. There were new local hires in Mountain Village, Anvik, Ruby, and Tanana and 6 returning surveyors. In one community, Ruby, the surveyor attended the training event but ended up being unable to do the surveys. We plan to work with the Ruby tribe and community next year to improve this.

During the fishing season, our surveyors interviewed 155 households in 455 interviews between May 30 and July 31. We had a goal to interview

more fishers this year and we met that goal as our numbers of interviews and households are up from last year when we interviewed 100 households in 375 interviews. The following table summarizes the number of households that participated in each community and the total number of interviews per community for 2016 and 2017.

Our surveyors participated in 9 teleconferences as part of their position, reporting for their villages. Additionally, some of them continued reporting on the teleconferences to the end of the season, as volunteers. This season the surveyors reported that in most communities the fishers were very happy with the fishing opportunities. They were especially happy with the chance to use 7½" nets. In most communities the fishers were able to meet their needs. In Alakanuk, Tanana, Fort Yukon and Eagle, fishers reported that their harvests were better or even much better than last year while Mountain Village fishers said the harvest was a little better than last year. There were

*continued on next page*

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association 2017 In-Season Salmon Survey					
Village	# of households interviewed		# of interviews total		date range
	2016	2017	2016	2017	
Alakanuk	12	41	65	126	May 30-July 17
Mountain Village	2	9	2	40	June 5 - July 17
Marshall	15	18	85	78	June 5- July 10
Russian Mission	20	21	35	34	June 5 -July 10
Anvik	8	12	12	32	June 12-July 17
Ruby	9	0	36	0	----
Huslia	5	20	29	40	June 19- July 24
Tanana	7	5	31	37	June 19-July 31
Fort Yukon	18	23	52	42	June 26-July 31
Eagle	4	6	28	26	June 19-July 24
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>May 30 - July 31</b>

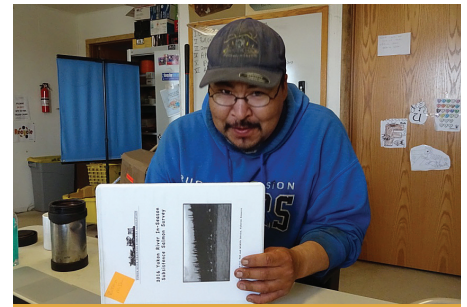
## Salmon Survey... *continued*

many thanks extended by the fishers throughout the participating communities, complementing the managers on their efforts to provide fishing opportunities this year.

One surveyor explained some of the benefits of a stronger run and more fishing opportunities, "the more people catch, the more people share their fish, their spot, their processing methods." He further explained that fishing spots were being shared multiple times, with fishers meeting their needs and passing the spot to the next fisher.

A post-season evaluation of the program is conducted annually through interviews with the surveyors, managers, and community members who are

fishers or representatives at the Tribal Councils. This year we found that those surveyed feel that the program does help to keep fishers and managers informed and engaged as to what is happening on the river in-season, although in some communities not all fishers want to participate. The surveyors really enjoy the training event and the opportunity to network and learn from each other. They also enjoy participating in the teleconferences and feel that a lot of good information is shared up and down the river. Retaining surveyors from year to year improves their performance. Some of the community representatives reviewing the program found that participation has broadened their perspective on the vastness of the river and the people along it, "we know that there is 1000 miles of river that the fish have to swim up. We know more about the



Surveyor, Basil Larson, in Russian Mission

people above us and below us." Thank you for a great season! Whether you are a fisher, who was interviewed or participated in the teleconference, a surveyor, or a manager we appreciate your participation and support in strengthening our united voice for the Yukon River! And thank you to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program for funding this program. 🐟

# Abundance, Distribution, and Migration Patterns of Yukon River Summer Chum Salmon

BY SEAN LARSON, ALASKA DEPT. OF FISH AND GAME, SEAN.LARSON@ALASKA.GOV

Where do summer chum travel and spawn on the Yukon River? When do different stocks enter the river and how fast do they swim to their spawning locations? These questions were answered when a large scale radio telemetry study was conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in 2014 and 2015.

Community members and ADF&G staff worked together to tag over 2,400 summer chum salmon near Russian Mission. Summer chum salmon were given a radio tag that sent out a unique signal which allowed researchers to track individual salmon as they traveled upriver to their spawning streams. Telemetry receivers located along the river and aerial surveys were used to locate tagged fish in the mainstem Yukon River, its tributaries, and remote spawning areas. Precise locations of tagged fish were mapped; travel rates along different sections of the river were estimated; proportions of tagged fish among different tributaries were determined; and drainage wide abundance above the tagging site was estimated.

Summer chum salmon had a wide distribution within the Yukon River drainage and entered over 60 tributaries to spawn; however, roughly 50% of tagged fish entered the Anvik, Koyukuk, and Bonasila rivers each year. Summer

chum salmon returning to the upper Yukon River entered the river earlier and traveled upriver faster than summer chum salmon returning to the lower Yukon River. For example, fish bound for the Koyukuk River were encountered at the tagging site earlier and traveled much faster than fish bound for the Anvik or Bonasila rivers. In addition, summer chum salmon traveled relatively fast within the mainstem but then slowed down after entering tributaries. The mark-recapture abundance estimate above the tagging site at Russian Mission was about 2,100,000 fish each year.

This study provided valuable information needed for successful summer chum salmon management. Managers can use this information to identify when individual summer chum salmon stocks are most likely to be present within various locations of the Yukon River drainage, how fast particular stocks travel upriver, and how each stock contributes to the entire run. Having the ability to monitor specific stocks through time is very important in fisheries management, especially on a river as large as the Yukon. This project was a collaborative effort and the Department would like to thank everyone who contributed to this project, particularly those who helped with tagging or returned caught radio tags. This project was funded by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund. 🐟





# Yukon River Comprehensive Salmon Plan Update

BY JILL KLEIN, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO ADF&G COMMISSIONER

Photo courtesy of Serena Alstrom Fita

The Yukon River Comprehensive Salmon Plan (CSP) is being updated by the Yukon River Regional Planning Team (RPT), which is comprised of nine knowledgeable residents from the Yukon River that are appointed by the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) in combination with Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) staff from commercial fisheries, subsistence, and sport fish divisions. To broaden out the representation there are ex-officio non-voting members to include Association of Village Council Presidents, Tanana Chiefs Conference, the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The RPT work to update the CSP is being partially funded through the Bering Sea Fishermen's Association with Yukon River salmon disaster funds.

There is a current CSP in place that was compiled by the ADF&G and YRDFA and approved by the Commissioner of ADF&G in 1998. This plan is still valid but is nearly 20 years old. The current plan states in its guiding principles that large-scale enhancement projects (i.e. Hatcheries) designed to create new runs of fish are opposed. The plan emphasized responsible in-season salmon management, habitat restoration, and investigative studies on Yukon River salmon populations. These are primary areas for agencies, organizations and individuals to focus their present and future resources for maintaining the long-term viability of Yukon River salmon stocks. The 1998 plan is being reviewed and updated to include current information about the fishery and to take account of changes that have happened since the first plan was developed.

The plan has chapters on Alaska's salmon fishery enhancement program to include:

- Authority, purpose and historical perspective,
- Historical status of Yukon River commercial, subsistence and sport fisheries,
- The area of coverage with maps of the Yukon River,
- A mission, goals and strategies for phase II of the plan,
- Planning, permitting and reporting regulations,
- Policies and public benefits of fishery enhancement,
- And current and historical projects and potential Yukon River systems for restoration and enhancement.

The RPT started meeting to update the plan in June 2016 and is nearing the end of the timeline. Village meetings took place along the Yukon River this summer in Hooper Bay, Alakanuk, Saint Mary's, Russian Mission, Alakaket, Fort Yukon, Galena, Nenana and Minto to gather input from local residents on what they would like to see for the future of their fishery with salmon goals and habitat projects. Currently a public working draft of the CSP is nearly finalized and will be shared with the public for their input before the plan is finalized.

The specific portions of the plan that the RPT has been working on include the mission, goals and strategies as well as potential systems for restoration or enhancement. The mission of the Yukon River Comprehensive Salmon restoration, rehabilitation and enhancement plan is to promote through biological, cultural and traditional practices and activities to

maintain or increase salmon production in the Yukon River region for the maximal social and economic benefits of the users consistent with the public interest.

The priorities for implementing projects shall be in this order:

- (1) rehabilitating habitat and wild stocks,
- (2) restoring habitat and wild stocks,
- (3) enhancing habitat,
- (4) enhancing existing common property fisheries, and
- (5) creating new common property fisheries through enhancement.

There is concern that enhancement projects designed to create new runs of fish could significantly impact wild stocks and management of mixed stock fisheries are to be approached with great caution. Enhancement includes hatcheries, as well as other types of projects like small in-stream incubation and egg planting efforts, such as what Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation has been working on.

This plan gives the residents of the region a voice in the planning process and the opportunity to say if they would like more salmon in the Yukon River. Communities can give input on what they would like to see happen along the Yukon River with respect to salmon stocks and how they want them to be maintained. People can say if they do, or do not, want hatcheries and the RPT will seek continued community and public input into the plan before it is finalized and sent to the Commissioner of ADF&G for approval. 🐟

# Elders Gather in Anchorage for Yup'ik Language Workshop on King Salmon

BY CATHERINE MONCRIEFF, YRDFA ANTHROPOLOGIST

Earlier this year, 6 knowledgeable Elders from the lower Yukon River traveled to Anchorage to participate in a 3-day workshop discussing their knowledge and experiences with King salmon. The workshop was funded by the National Science Foundation and hosted in partnership with Calista Education and Culture (CEC). It was held in Central Alaskan Yup'ik language in early February at Ann Fienup-Riordan's house on the Anchorage Hillside.



L to R: back row - Raymond Waska (Emmonak), Paul Beans (Mountain Village - deceased); front row - Frances Charlie (Scammon Bay), Michael Hunt (Kotlik), Nick Andrew, Sr. (Marshall)



Frances Charlie and Nick Andrew Sr. sharing a laugh.

The participating Elders were selected through nominations from their Tribal Councils, CEC, and YRDFA. The goal was to have a small number of participants so each Elder would be able to talk at length, allowing for in-depth detailed discussion in their first language. During the workshop, the Elders talked about their background and relationships with salmon. They talked about their fishing experience and changes they've observed over their lifetimes. The entire workshop was recorded and we are currently awaiting the translation and transcription. Results of the workshop will be shared with Yukon River communities, fishery managers, and other interested individuals and organizations.

Thank you to the participating Elders:

- Raymond Waska of Emmonak
- Frances Charlie of Scammon Bay
- Michael Hunt of Kotlik
- Paul Beans of Mountain Village
- Evan Polty of Pilot Station
- Nick Andrew Sr. of Marshall

Thanks to the Tribal Councils of the Lower Yukon River for their input and careful consideration of nominees, and to CEC for the enthusiastic support and valuable knowledge in hosting these types of events, specifically Mark John, Alice Rearden, and Ann Fienup-Riordan. Thanks also to our wonderful and talented Yup'ik language translators – Rebecca Nayamin and Davina Carl.

Our hearts go out to the family, friends, and community surrounding Paul Beans who passed away since this workshop was held. His passing reinforces the importance of documenting Elder's knowledge. Today's Yukon River Elders represent the last generation that lived off the land and traveled with the seasons, relying on salmon as well as other plants and animals for their sustenance. They learned to make keen observations, they were taught by their Elders and from their Elders before them in the traditional passing on of knowledge between generations. It is imperative that we capture as much information as possible from this group of people who had a direct connection with the land and the natural resources they relied on for survival. 🐟

The Lt. Governor and the delegation of visitors receive a warm welcome in Nulato.



Photos courtesy of Tanana Chiefs Conference



Chiefs, Elders and residents give testimony at a meeting in Allakaket.

# ADF&G Summer Outreach

BY HOLLY CARROLL, YUKON RIVER SUMMER SEASON AREA MANAGER

This season, I teamed up with staff from Subsistence Division to hold in-season meetings in Yukon River communities. These trips were a great opportunity to learn from residents about their fishing, the way of life particular to their village, and listen to people’s concerns about fishery management. We visited Grayling, Nulato, Beaver and Fort Yukon and got to experience fish camp, checking the nets and fish wheels, and sharing meals.

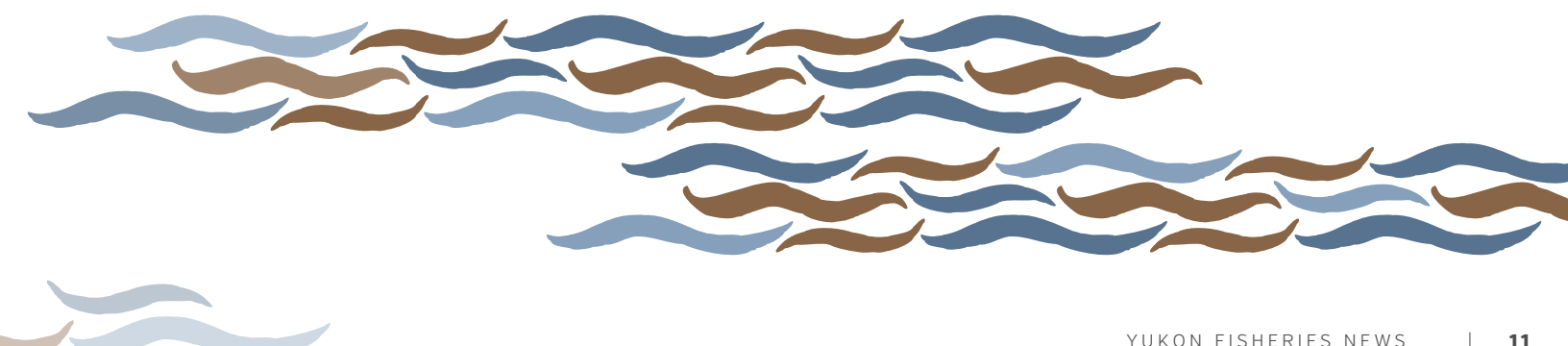
Tanana Chiefs Conference organized a trip for the Lt. Governor, Tribal leaders and a delegation of staff including ADF&G Commissioner and myself for a three day charter-tour of many Yukon and Koyukuk River communities. The trip was so important, especially for the ADF&G staff to hear directly from people about King salmon management and how it affects their lives uniquely in each village. This was

an incredible trip and a wonderful chance to meet so many of you face to face! From Elders and Tribal Chiefs to the youth just starting to fish, we heard excellent stories, testimony and critical feedback, which we have taken to heart. The hosting communities were: Huslia, Hughes, Allakaket, Koyukuk, Nulato, Kaltag, Galena, and Ruby. We could not have been to so many communities without the generosity and planning done by TCC; I’m grateful for the experience.

In an effort to better get the word out about fishery openings and daily counts at various projects, ADF&G launched a Facebook page called “Yukon River Fishing-ADFG”. All the news releases throughout the season are posted here, including the weekly update which is a summary of all the assessment project data, commercial harvest and the subsistence and com-

mercial fishing schedules for every district. Please check out the Facebook page, like it and share it!

As an Area Manager my job often involves making tough decisions with the management team based on data from many sources. It is personally very important to me that I get to visit the many communities along the Yukon and meet the people whose lives are affected by the decisions we make. To see how people catch and process their fish, and hear how changes in climate or management are affecting their way of life is critical to my job. It’s our goal to improve communications and outreach on the Yukon, so please share any ideas you have with us, and if you’d like to plan a visit or meeting in your community next season, please let us know (holly.carroll@alaska.gov).



# Assisting Yukon River Community Voices in BLM Planning

BY WAYNE JENKINS, YRDFA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



*Fish drying and antlers in Rampart.*

Since July of 2014 YRDFA has partnered with the PEW Charitable Trusts (PEW) to assist Yukon River communities in the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Resource Management Planning process (RMP). Community voices in BLM land planning are important because the BLM manages millions of acres of public land that is also traditional land for Yukon River communities.

BLM, as a federal land management agency, is directed by Congress through the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 to create Resource Management Plans that guide land management decisions of this public land. The land planning process is long, usually taking 3-5 years, but once complete the final plan is in place for 15-20 years and guides management decisions over that time. In the planning process, BLM is required to gain input from the public on issues and concerns on the management of public land. In the nation, BLM administers over 247 million acres; over 72 million acres are in Alaska within 8 planning regions.

Three of these planning areas include portions of the Yukon River and two are in active planning mode; the Central Yukon and the Bering Sea-Western Interior regions and involve 26 million acres of public land. PEW understands the challenges of small remote communities and the difficulty of keeping track in the lengthy BLM planning process and sought a partnership with YRDFA due to our past involvement in fisheries issues and communities on the Yukon River.

YRDFA's community support work is focused on the Central Yukon and Bering Sea-Western Interior RMP regions. For a community, YRDFA's support is useful as the land planning process is a complicated and time consuming and villages are often challenged due to many existing issues and responsibilities. BLM is short on staff for bringing important issues forward to all the affected communities. Early on, tribal councils and communities, after coming to better understand the BLM planning process, made it clear the main concerns were access to and protection of traditional use areas necessary to continue the essential way of life. YRDFA and PEW worked with communities on a useful approach to bring these concerns to BLM.

BLM has a management designation called an Area of Critical Environmental Concern or ACEC. Created in the 1976 FLPMA legislation, Congress established an **Area of Critical Environmental Concern** as a way to provide special management for special values, such as fish and wildlife resources or cultural sites on public lands. ACECs are also created to conserve or prevent damage to important historic, cultural values, or to protect fragile landscapes and sensitive ecosystems. PEW and YRDFA offered information about the nominating process for communities as a way for communities to ask for protection of the critically important areas that local communities have depended on for thousands of years and are necessary to carry the culture forward.

Invitations for village visits to discuss the BLM land management process and village needs were made to individual communities with one million or more acres of BLM lands within fifty miles. Traditional use areas were discussed and mapped by use and watershed. Sometimes excellent reports and maps already existed in studies done by the ADF&G Subsistence Division in collaboration with a tribe and community, which were very helpful. ADF&G traditional land use mapping included maps for large mammals-bear and moose, small mammals, salmon and non-salmon

fish species, birds and waterfowl and greens and berries. Communities added areas important for drinking water, fish spawning areas and wood gathering. Nearly a dozen communities have made nominations to BLM for protection of traditional land now managed by the agency.

We thank the Yukon and Kuskokwim River communities that have invited our assistance as they strive to respond to BLM's invitation to provide concerns about the RMPs. The desire of the tribal governments and communities in making nominations for protection of traditional land is to increase BLM's understanding of the community importance of these areas, request their protection through the

Resource Management Planning and ACEC process and address the federal government's trust responsibility with tribal nations. Communities wish BLM to recognize and support protecting traditional land through the plan and develop an improved working relationship with the communities their management decisions most directly affect.

We are available to work with other Yukon and Kuskokwim River communities in BLM's Central Yukon and Bering Sea Western Interior planning regions. If you would like to learn more, contact Wayne Jenkins at YRDFA for details. Also see the YRDFA Facebook page and the "Our Land, Our Voice, Our Future" website and Facebook page. 🐟

# YRDFA 2017 Resolutions

27th Annual Meeting: Fairbanks, Alaska · April 18-19, 2017

These are the Resolutions APPROVED unanimously by the Board members and delegates of YRDFA assembled at their 27th Annual Meeting held in Fairbanks, Alaska on April 18th, 2017.

**Resolution: 2017-01**  
**South Uminak and Shumagin June Salmon Fishery Chinook Bycatch**

WHEREAS the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) works on behalf of subsistence and commercial fishing families within the Alaskan and Canadian Yukon River drainage who depend on wild salmon for subsistence and commercial fisheries; and

WHEREAS Chinook salmon runs have been very low in recent years, with Canadian escapement goals met only three times in the past seven years and the economic health of the communities reliant on the healthy return of salmon; and

WHEREAS bycatch of Chinook salmon in the Bering Sea Pollock fishery

is a significant source of mortality for these struggling populations and Western Alaskan communities have been advocating for bycatch reduction for decades;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that YRDFA requests the state do genetic testing on the Chinook bycatch in the South Uminak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Fishery to determine their points of origin.

**Resolution: 2017-02**  
**Escapement Goals for One Full Life Cycle**

WHEREAS the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) works on behalf of subsistence and commercial fishing families within the Alaskan and Canadian Yukon River drainage who depend on wild salmon for subsistence and commercial fisheries; and WHEREAS Chinook salmon runs have been very low in recent years; and

WHEREAS Due to increased conservation measures, we've seen

three years of escapement that have met or exceeded the upper range of escapement goals; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED YRDFA would like to see continued escapement goals met for one full life cycle.



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Thank you!

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