

Yukon Fisheries News

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2021

Summer Season 2021

BY DEENA JALLEN, ADF&G SUMMER YUKON ACTING MANAGER

2020 is behind us and we are looking forward to summer 2021. While the global pandemic continues to affect us, we are hopeful for increased vaccinations, decreased COVID-19 transmission, and spending more time (safely, outside, socially distanced) with people along the Yukon River. This spring we have been working to update mitigation plans for the safe operation of projects and look forward to getting more projects deployed this summer. The Lower Yukon Test Fishery near Emmonak and Alakanuk, and the Pilot Station sonar project will provide important information about the timing and size of the runs as the salmon return to the river. The Eagle sonar project and weirs on some tributaries are also expected to operate this year and count fish as they near their spawning areas. We will be working closely with communities to make sure project operating plans are acceptable.

From the Lower Yukon Test Fishery we get early timing information about salmon as they enter the river, relative abundance data, and collect age sex and length information. Pilot Station sonar is an essential assessment project because we can estimate the number of fish daily, the run size for each species, and the size of the Canadian-origin Chinook salmon run. Sonar estimates directly inform our management decisions, allowing us to close or restrict fishing if the runs come in weaker

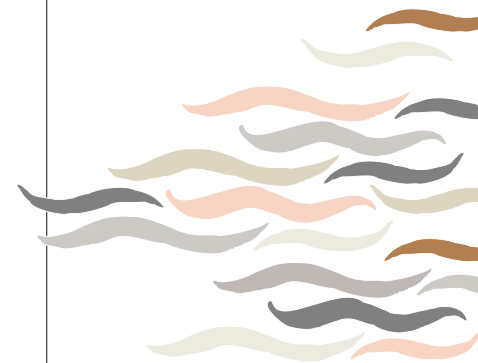
than expected, or open fishing if the run looks strong. Using the sonar helps us to better understand if a surplus is available for harvest, to meet escapement goals and border objectives with Canada. Managers will use information from all inseason assessment projects and fishermen reports to make decisions based on the best available data and projections.

The 2021 drainage-wide Chinook salmon outlook is for a run size of 102,000 to 188,000 fish, which is likely to be smaller than the than 2020 run. Chinook salmon escapement goals were not met in 2020, despite fishery restrictions and closures. For the last two years, far fewer Canadian-origin Chinook salmon have been making it to the border than we expected based on inseason Pilot Station sonar counts. This 'difference between estimates' or 'missing fish' add an extra layer of complexity to salmon management. We will be watching assessment projects closely this season and listening to fishermen's observations about river conditions, dead or diseased fish, or unusual events. A cautionary approach will be taken early in the season, and management strategies will be adjusted based on run assessment.

The summer chum salmon run forecast is for a run of 1.2 million fish, which is less than last year.

HOW DO I BECOME A YRDFA MEMBER?

- Go to yukonsalmon.org
- Go to YRDFA's Facebook page
- Fill out and mail in the form on page 15



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



CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Yukon River In-Season Salmon Teleconferences

WILL BEGIN ON

JUNE 1, 2021

Your voice is needed to participate in your fishery. Managers and other fishermen need you! You may need other fishermen and their observations in their part of the river.

All Yukon River fishermen and those interested in Yukon River fishing are invited to call in to the Yukon River In-Season Salmon Teleconference on Tuesdays at 1pm in May, June, July, and August. These calls are an opportunity to:

- Share what you are seeing in your part of the river.
- Hear what is happening in other parts of the river.
- Hear what the managers have learned from the monitoring projects.
- Hear what the managers have planned for upcoming management actions.
- Ask managers questions directly.

**Call 1-800-315-6338,
code 98566# (YUKON)**

Photo courtesy of Violet Burnham, Kaltag



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News from the Director

As we prepare for the upcoming 2021 fishing season, I have a bit of anxiety. I cannot help but think about the families of the Yukon River who depend on the fish, the many empty fish camps, and having to find other ways to pass down our traditional knowledge. On the other hand, I want as many kings as possible to make it to the spawning grounds, not only for me to enjoy when I am an elder, but also for my children and their children to be able to practice what we have been passing down to them—our culture.

We have hard decisions to make as individuals, as providers, and as keepers of cultural knowledge. As I attend meeting after meeting about Yukon River fisheries, I keep hearing the words “change” and “we need to fish [subsist].” Growing up in the Lower Yukon, I understand the need to be out on the river and that it is the same for all people who live in the Yukon River communities. The river provides us with food for our families; it teaches us responsibility and gives us purpose in our lives.

The current conditions on the Yukon River require change. The people of the Yukon River are struggling with the change required in these times. We want



BY SERENA FITKA

to make sure we can keep our traditions alive. But when it is all said and done, there are hard questions we must ask ourselves, and we have to have some courageous discussions. How can we, the people of the Yukon River, provide a balance between our livelihood and conservation? What are we willing to do to make sure we have food on the table and salmon for our grandchildren?

Times have changed, and fishing has evolved. Our villages are larger, and we have high-power motors and bigger nets—yet we are screaming for more. In those early years, we had enough fish. We also had smaller populations

and simple measures to get a few fish—smaller nets and smaller boat motors. We are out of balance, and the river, our environment, is not able to sustain us along with our neighbors.

To put it into perspective in modern society, think of the salmon as money. The managers are you and every other homeowner. We budget our money. We are given money from our job, and the more work we do, the more money we get. But we want to see that money grow, so we put some away in the bank (in this case, the spawning grounds) and watch it grow. It may not turn into millions overnight, or even in a month or a year, but it will grow. The more money we put in the bank, the more it will grow. But that, in turn, means we keep fewer and fewer money at hand for ourselves.

Our organization will guide the conversation in October to discuss these hard questions. Now is the time we must become proactive and put forth the solutions that are necessary to enact the changes we want to see. Together we can make this happen.

I hope everyone has a safe summer season. Pirrua. 🍷

Photo courtesy of Katie Nick, Russian Mission



A LETTER FROM A CONCERNED FISHERMAN

A perspective on the decline of the Yukon River Chinook run, and some solutions

To: Yukon River Chinook managers (ADF&G, USFWS, Alaska Board of Fisheries), YRDFA, Yukon River fishermen, and any other interested parties or organizations.

Respected Managers;

I would like to share with you a perspective: an overview of the decline of the Chinook salmon fishery on the Yukon River. This is an account of Chinook salmon management efforts from 1990 onward, that began in (understandable) ignorance, segued into a middle period of years of denial, and then finally, metamorphosed into an era of conservation efforts of varying effectiveness, up to this current year.

This last season, 2020, I saw some positive and very decisive movement in management strategy amidst a Chinook and Chum salmon shortage and I want to compliment you for your courage in taking that on. Because of that, I feel more inclined to try to take another crack at sharing things that I've observed as a fisherman in District 5A, that may be of value to you. I have run a fish wheel in The Rapids as a subsistence fisherman and commercial permit holder for 35 years. Understanding and accepting the history of how the crisis of the Chinook fishery came to pass is important--not out of academic interest, but because it lays the groundwork to rectifying that crisis. Along the way I remind myself that I, and every fisherman and manager, on the river shares responsibility for the problem. Although much of the discussion here is about decisions made by the Department, fishermen have played an equal part by pressuring the Department with relentless demands to open the fishery, viewing the resource as unlimited.

Running a fish wheel in The Rapids in the same spot for 35 years is unusual continuity. The banks are rock and essentially unchanging. We use the same dimensions of wheel and "lead" (the underwater fence that wheel fishermen employ to guide the fish towards the wheel) year after year. We have fished over and over again all possible river heights, from the beginning to the end of every season. The variables in our on-going unofficial census of Chinook are few. We have our immediate fishing neighbors to compare our daily catch with, and, for years, have given each other permission to check the contents of our neighbors' wheels as we go to empty our own. We keep close tabs on how the run is shaping up as the fish come upriver, so we often compare what managers see with what we all see at our unofficial "weir". I don't pretend to cite this as a statistically correct Chinook census project, but I believe it has solid scientific value, particularly after a period of so many years. The fact that the wheel fishermen in The Rapids were the first to notice and draw attention to the declining size and run strength of the Chinook ought to carry some weight as well. Having a USFWS counting project running out of The Rapids for a period of years gave us an ongoing discussion of salmon biology. Fred Anderson, Randy Brown, Tevis Underwood, Dave Daum, and others were always up for talking about the science of the salmon runs when we were trying to make sense of what we were seeing in our wheels.

I was a Yukon River Salmon treaty negotiation delegate in the 1990's, and I fished salmon in Kodiak and Bristol Bay. My fellow Rapids wheel fishermen and I have been to more BOF meetings than I care to count. We are all well aware that fish have a life beyond what we see at our fish wheels.

Here are my observations:

1. About 20 years ago it was becoming clear that we didn't need to duck to get under the King salmon strips hanging up to dry in our smoke-house. The big females 30# plus were becoming increasingly scarce, and the 40 pounders were almost non-existent.
2. Fisheries experts like retired ADF&G Yukon manager Fred Anderson (with the luxury of being able to speak freely) were saying frankly that the run had been overfished.
3. Counting salmon on the Yukon River is admittedly one of the toughest jobs in fisheries management, and a period of abundance in the 1980's was interpreted as a series of average-sized runs, when in retrospect that period was an anomaly. It was, however, certainly to the benefit of fishermen to interpret it as a normal and sustainable run size, and it was the path of least resistance for fisheries managers to regulate it as such.
4. Being a summer fisheries manager on the Yukon River involves withstanding pressure and often abuse from fishermen, particularly for managers who are located on the lower river and who are subjected to a local torrent of pressure to open the Chinook fishery as the first fish are coming through. From the early 1990's to around 2010, Chinook managers appeared very acquiescent with the wishes of Kwipak and the Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association, which could be summed up as: "open it up." Fishermen in the upriver districts certainly made no objections to this sentiment, and we bear responsibility as well.

5. The management situation in that era seemed sometimes to resemble a “company town”—what was good for the processors and fishermen was promoted by fisheries managers. While it would be going overboard to say managers of that time were “bought,” they certainly were co-opted to a degree. As time went on and as signs of the decline of the fishery began to become apparent, the scientific logic as explained to the BOF and the public by the fisheries managers of that era became more and more convoluted as it was bent to fit the goals of the commercial fishery. As kind of an aside, one of the managers of that era left ADF&G and entered the employ of the lower river commercial interests, something not notable in itself, but with the effect that this questionable “science” was perpetuated and amplified from that industry platform, which made it twice as hard to buck the conventional wisdom—that the fishery was fine.

6. For a long time a few fishers in our district felt like a voice in the wilderness trying to convince ADF&G and other fishermen that there was an ongoing crisis with the Chinook run.

Here is how that unfolded:

Concerns began with a few fishers in 1990 over the findings of Ichthyophonus disease in Chinook, and by 1996 the declining size problem was becoming apparent. By 2010 a few of us felt, after a decade of fighting a headwind of denial, that we were BEGINNING to be heard.

Now, in 2020, with a few exceptions, most people understand there is a problem. However, there are a significant number of fishermen that have yet to come to grips with either Ichthyophonus or the shrinking size of Chinook, and still feel the Bering Sea Pollock fleet is to blame and that shutting down fishing in-river is not needed.

7. There was damage done to the notion of conserving the resource

not just at that time, but also subsequently. After fishermen had been assured for years by managers that everything was fine, it became a lot harder to convince them otherwise. As it became increasingly clear that something WAS wrong with the Chinook run, fishermen fought the idea more than they might have if management had sounded the alarm earlier instead continuing in denial.

8. There is also human pride in one’s legacy as a motivation. No manager would want to be remembered as having presided over the end of one of the great fisheries of the world, so the incentive to deny it was happening would be strong. For a time towards the end of those two decades after 1990, there seemed to be an almost willful manipulation of data or experimental design to get the desired results. Several researchers from that time period have expressed regret privately about allowing themselves to be pressured into something they later concluded was border-line unethical.

9. This raises an interesting dilemma for a manager. Should a fisheries manager admit that he or she made a mistake in the past? Should they publicly acknowledge the history of the mistake? On the one hand, people often appreciate honesty, but countering that is the fear that your basic ability to manage the run will be called into question. Sometimes it might seem easier to just double down on your earlier position even if it is coming into doubt. But, ultimately, that course arouses resentment. It is better to acknowledge the mistake. This is a “tough sell” internally in any organization. Organizations are self-protective by nature.

10. Fishermen are not virtuous by nature. Voluntary cutbacks may work briefly to slow catch rates, but not for long. No group—ethnic, cultural, or geographic—has any claim to innate conservation virtue regardless of

what they may say. Citing everyone from their grandfather to the man in the moon doesn’t make it so. The most effective move by a manager is to simply close fishing when needed. Then fishers don’t have to agonize about how public spirited they should be—or not be.

11. With our ability to count the days of Chinook passage at the sonar at Pilot Station to their arrival in The Rapids, we wheel fisherman notice a distinct difference in the size and weight of fish that we catch in The Rapids depending on whether the run has been fished on in Districts 1, 2, 3 and 4, or has been protected by closures as it has made its way up to us. It is uncanny how the size of the fish suddenly increases when a cohort of truly “protected” fish arrives in The Rapids, or shrinks for a portion of the run that has been fished in the lower districts. The same is true for fishers in Canada when District 5 has fished on that portion of the run.

12. “Cape fishermen” (fishing efforts closer to the mouth) often tend to see their fisheries—first in line-- as the highest and best use of fish, because of quality, supply, number of fishers, backing of trade associations, and pride of occupation. Ironically, the best thing for conserving fish considering the difficulties of counting them accurately on the Yukon River would be to go very easy on them in the lower districts until it was completely clear what the strength of the run was, then managers would have the luxury of opening up the upper districts with a better sense of run timing and abundance. Instead, the pressure to open the lower districts is usually intense, and sometimes the upper districts are made to pay the price of conservation.

13. Since the BOF is loath to address allocation issues, the management problem persists indefinitely.

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14. The decline in the Chinook run over a period of years accustoms fishers slowly to declining size. The trend is particularly hard to notice or detect as a net fisherman since large mesh nets select for big fish. This is why fishers in the lower districts had trouble believing that the Chinook run was in trouble, especially when management and the processing industry of that era had been assuring them that everything was fine.

The result was that it has been a long slow road convincing some fishermen that there is a problem.

15. Reducing net mesh size by small increments as the BOF did has had the effect of targeting the next size down in fish, and so has progressively depleted the next age class down. Nets larger than 6" mesh size need to be eliminated for many years to come if we are to ever see a reversal of our size decline. ADF&G's run shut-down policy is a good one, and the most effective way to conserve fish and increase fish size is to not open the run.

The other horn of the dilemma is that if no fishing is permitted at all, there is a distinct danger of eliminating the life of fish camps, which are an integral part of the lives of many rural Alaskans in the interior. This makes the management problem twice as hard.

16. In areas of the river where two species of salmon are fished concurrently, or where, for example, a shortage of Chinook for a commercial harvest causes fishers to lobby for using more inventive ways to satisfy their commercial or subsistence needs using summer chums, the overharvest of one species may simply be passed on to the next species. This is an old story.

17. In this situation or with concurrent fisheries, the temptation for managers to permit live release of the threatened species is strong, but it is difficult

to monitor. Research by USFWS has shown that salmon are less tolerant of handling or holding than previously thought. It turned out that holding salmon in live boxes of fish wheels for any length of time or man-handling fish to get them back in the water was damaging to the fish, as was a rough trip down an unpadding fish wheel chute. Also, ensuring compliance of careful release methods is difficult or impossible. Extended to the beach seine fishery, the potential for abuse and damage to fish is obvious.

18. Blaming changing ocean conditions makes it easy to overlook overfishing in-river, and to continue with business as usual with a sense this is "not our problem." It is very likely true that Ocean conditions played a part in the collapse of the 2020 run, but it brings managers and fishermen perilously close to the situation from the late 1990's up to 2010, where the Bering Sea Pollock fleet and other problems-at-a-distance became a handy way to not examine too closely the damage that in-river fishing with large mesh nets or just plain in-river overfishing was doing to the Chinook fishery.

19. Although the research is solid that Ichthyophonous is present in Chinook and has a negative effect on their ability to make it to the spawning grounds, it doesn't get much consideration in Chinook management decisions. Aside from simple managerial inertia, there is a disincentive for commercial fishers and processors to raise the subject, as it potentially creates a marketing problem with fish that might be "diseased": it is bad PR.

20. ADF&G is to be lauded this year for holding the line and protecting the Chinook run. But—it is all too easy for fishermen or managers to backslide into an attitude where they might consider once again adopting a flexible and/or lower

escapement for Chinook: managers to relieve the heat that they find themselves being subjected to, and fishermen because they are tired of conservation and just want to fish. This is the kind of voodoo arithmetic that got the Chinook run into trouble in the first place, and it is dismaying in the extreme to see any signs of it resurfacing.

Solutions

Really there is only one big overarching solution, and that is to act decisively to protect fish. Our past strategy has often been thinking we could slowly whittle away at the problem. As the older age classes of fish begin to go extinct, we have taken half measures.

Here is the part where I wish you all luck grappling with the problem, and urge you to not be complacent about the management landscape. Rebuilding the size and strength of the run and the weights of the fish is going to be a long slog. We may be past the point of no return at this point for some age classes. At best, we are at the very beginning of STARTING to rebuild. It takes many years of persistence, and we are nowhere close to the point of celebrating success.

But, we know what the right thing to do is. I urge you to be tough-minded and act decisively **in 2021 and going forward** to protect the Chinook and Chum runs on the Yukon. Do the right thing and make that happen; stand on solid ground. We can do this together.

Thank you very much, I appreciate your work.

Sincerely,

Charlie Campbell

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alaskaruthandcharlie@yahoo.com 🐟

Summer Season 2021 ...CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

A run of this size is anticipated to provide for escapement, subsistence harvests, and some surplus for commercial harvest. In 2020, we saw a low number of age-4 summer chum salmon, which could mean a low number of age-5 returns this year. Information from the juvenile trawl survey indicated that the younger age classes had good abundance, so we hope to see more age-4 summer chum salmon this year.

Similar to previous years, harvest opportunities for summer chum salmon are anticipated to be limited by the

management of a below average Chinook salmon run. Use of selective gear types, such as dip nets, beach seines, and live release fish wheels will be necessary this year to help protect Chinook salmon. The amount of commercial fishing opportunity for summer chum salmon will depend on run timing and abundance, Chinook salmon conservation measures, and processor operations.

The 2021 season, assessment and management strategies will be discussed in meetings this spring, including the

Yukon River Panel (public session on April 13 and 14) and YRDFA preseason meeting. We anticipate sending out the Outlook flier in early May. As always, we look forward to hearing from fishermen as the rivers break up and fish start to return! 🐟

Get announcements and more by liking us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/YukonRiverFishingADFG

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YRDFA Election Process

As YRDFA has grown over its 30-year life span, there has been a need for the organization to change and adapt in certain capacities. One of those capacities has been the election process for our board of directors and alternate seats. The board and staff have been working on a change in how we recruit and retain these crucial roles for our organization.

From our inception we held annual elections, where the members of YRDFA would vote on their local delegate to represent them. What we have found is that this process had become incredibly time consuming and costly.

For the last several years we've been working on a new approach to our elections, and in 2017 the following process was passed by the board of directors:

Current serving Board members whose term is ending can self-nominate, if they wish, to retain their seat. If the seat is open, the prior Board member can nominate a new potential Director from their Fishing District for Board approval. If no nominee is forthcoming from the previous Director, the YRDFA Board and staff will seek a qualified candidate for the open position that can gain approval from the full Board.

We continue to follow the board terms that were set up in our By-Laws. Current terms of office are:

Coastal District (Seat 1)	3 year term	expires 2021
Y-1 (Seat 1)	3 year term	expires 2021
Y-1 (Seat 2)	2 year term	expires 2021
Y-1 (Seat 3)	2 year term	expires 2022
Y-2 (Seat 1)	3 year term	expires 2021
Y-2 (Seat 2)	2 year term	expires 2021
Y-2 (Seat 3)	2 year term	expires 2022
Y-3 (Seat 1)	3 year term	expires 2021
Y-4 (Seat 1)	3 year term	expires 2021
Y-4 (Seat 2)	2 year term	expires 2022
Y-5 (Seat 1)	3 year term	expires 2021
Y-5 (Seat 2)	2 year term	expires 2021
Y-6 (Seat 1)	3 year term	expires 2021
Y-6 (Seat 2)	2 year term	expires 2022
Koyukuk River (Seat 1)	2 year term	expires 2021
Yukon Flats / 5-D (Seat 1)	2 year term	expires 2021



The Future of Tribal Land will be Decided (Part 2 of 2)

BY SUZANNE LITTLE

Bering Sea-Western Interior Tribal Commission Formed: July 23 & 24, 2019

The Bering Sea and Interior Tribal Commission formed in the summer of 2019 in response to BLM ignoring Tribal concerns in planning documents. The Commission was initially composed of Cooperating Agency Tribes from the Bering Sea-Western Interior planning area and now includes all Tribes that wish to join under this mission:

The purpose of the Tribal Commission is to work in unity to protect and support our traditional way of life in perpetuity by advocating for land and water use planning processes and sustainable natural resource management decisions that meaningfully reflect our voices and values.

Regions Represented in the Tribal Commission at this time are: Kawerak, Tanana Chiefs Conference & Association of Village Council Presidents.

Tribes Primary Request of the Bureau of Land Management and the Department of the Interior for the Bering Sea-Western Interior Plan:

BLM should create watershed protections as in Alternative B, including ACECs where mining is prohibited or create development setbacks from rivers to the edge of the high-value-watershed zones to protect our watersheds and habitat supporting our wild food.

Bering Sea Western Interior Planning Process from Tribes' Perspective

- Process is terribly wrong and the Resource Management Planning Process flawed because impacts to Tribal communities were not considered or evaluated adequately by BLM in the plan.
- BLM failed in its outreach and communication with Tribes. For instance, BLM has had no functioning Tribal Liaison despite having 60 Tribes in the planning area and BLM's response to Cooperating Agency Status requests was sometimes delayed for 10 months to a year. Some lower-Kuskokwim communities received little information nor were these Tribes' subsistence impacts evaluated.
- 2014 Tribal nominations of watersheds to achieve protection from mining, were all ignored in the Draft Plan of the Bering Sea-Western Interior Plan.
- Fast-tracked process. Cooperating Agency Tribes were given 9 days to review a 3,000-page document in the middle of subsistence season. It seriously burdens Tribes that must take subsistence time to comment and advocate for our way-of-life.



- Case of Environmental Injustice: Our Tribal communities will bear the entire impact burden from the current Bering Sea-Western Interior Resource Management Plan decisions and BLM has ignored our voices.

BLM said our Tribal nominations for conservation of critical watersheds were relevant and important but then opened all areas Tribes nominated to mining. It's not that Tribes really like Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), we just don't want our food security to be undermined by mining.

BLM's ACEC Report talks about the Big River near McGrath and says quote, "This area of the Big River is rare and irreplaceable for Kuskokwim River Sheefish Spawning." An ACEC designation in this high-mineral potential area would provide protection for this important sheefish spawning area.

BLM's ACEC Report's quote about the Anvik River says "The Anvik River is considered the largest single-wild-stock producer of summer chum salmon in the Yukon River Drainage and possibly in the world. As Chinook salmon numbers have declined in recent years, the significance of chum salmon from the Anvik River for food security has increased. For this reason, the chum salmon population in the Anvik river warrants protection." Mining should not be allowed in this watershed.

The federal government has said much of the land being planned has a low-mineral potential finding that will result in very little mining, despite the land being open to mining. The Federal Government has told Tribes many times, "trust us"—and over time, Tribes have learned that is not a good bet. The Tribal Commission is asking the federal government to balance the extractive economy with our wild food economy and create some very reasonable protections for critical watersheds nominated by Tribes. 🍷

In-Season Subsistence Salmon Survey Program prepares to begin 2021 season

Many YRDFA surveyors are excited to meet in person for their annual training event after a year of pandemic isolation and restricted travel. Most of the surveyors will be gathering, socially distant and masked, in Fairbanks for our annual training event on Monday, April 26th. This will be YRDFA's first in-person meeting in over a year. YRDFA decided to hold the surveyor training in-person because together we are a fairly small group and will be able to be socially distant and we benefit tremendously from the face-to-face meetings and sharing

of experiences. Surveyors will also be invited to participate in the Pre-Season district meetings and full Pre-Season planning meeting, virtually, along with the rest of the river.

Through the In-season Subsistence Salmon Survey Program, YRDFA hires a local person in 10 communities along the Yukon River stretching from Alakanuk to Eagle to survey fishers during the Chinook salmon season in their community. The observations fishers share with YRDFA surveys are summarized by

community to protect anonymity and then shared with Yukon River In-season Managers and the Yukon River community through the In-season Salmon Management Teleconferences. This important communication tool helps managers ensure that both Yukon River escapement is met and as many subsistence fishers are meeting their goals as possible. This project is funded by the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program through March of 2024. 🐟

They Told Us There'd Come a Time...

CONSERVING FISH, PRESERVING TRADITION ON THE YUKON RIVER **A Catalog of Elders' Warnings**

In late January, we kicked off a new project working with young adults from the Tanana Chiefs Conference region with a virtual training event. The goal of our project, funded by the North Pacific Research Board, is to work with young adult Emerging Leaders to research documented Local and Traditional Knowledge of salmon and learn about warnings from Elders about salmon shortages or threats. Our training event lasted two days and included presentations from the University of Alaska Fairbanks Alaska and Polar Regional Collections and Archives staff Leslie McCartney and Rachel Cohen, who taught us about the oral resources and archives housed at UAF. On day two, we wrapped up the archives discussions and talked about our additional Outreach grant from the North Pacific Research Board. We heard tips about exciting and dynamic ways to share our results from Howdice Brown, Jacqui Lambert and Alice Glenn of *Native Time*. They represented video production, podcasting, and storytelling through the written word.



Following *Native Time's* presentation, Adam Demientieff of TCC Communications shared their lessons learned from the creation of their amazing *Legacy of Our Elders* series.



Emerging Leaders who are participating in this program include young adults from Kaltag, Holy Cross, Rampart, Beaver, Grayling and Nenana. The TCC Employment and Training staff attended the January training and shared a history of the Emerging Leaders program. During the training, we had the opportunity to conduct preliminary searches in the oral history archives and some of our young adults found recordings of their family members of which they were unaware. The training was an exciting start to our project and we look forward to continuing the work. 🐟



Fall 2021 Pre-season Outlook

The 2020 fishing season offered many hardships and challenges for fishermen along the Yukon River. Continued Chinook salmon restrictions, combined with one of the poorest runs of fall chum salmon ever seen on record and the subsequent closure of all fishing for fall chum salmon, led to many fishermen being unable to put up the fish they needed. That, coupled with the adversities of the pandemic, resulted with a year that many Yukon River fishermen would soon like to forget.

The view for fall chum salmon in 2021 appears to be better. The drainage wide outlook for fall chum salmon in 2021 is a range from 542,000 – 762,000 fish. A fall chum salmon run size within this range, although well below average, would be sufficient to meet escapement goals, treaty objectives, and provide for an average subsistence harvest.

The fall season begins by regulation in the lower river July 16. The department will revise the forecast in early July. As you may know, there is a good relationship between summer chum and fall chum salmon run sizes, and it allows us to revise the outlook. With the present forecast, managers anticipate all districts and subdistricts will begin the fall sea-

son on full regulatory subsistence fishing schedules. Subsistence fishing restrictions in the U.S. portion of the mainstem Porcupine River are likely, to get more fall chum salmon to Canadian portion of the Porcupine River. The amount of commercial fishing opportunity, if any, is uncertain. Following the Yukon River fall chum salmon management plan, a projected run size of 550,000 fall chum salmon, and an available surplus, are required to allow commercial fishing. More will be known once the forecast is revised in early July and inseason assessment is available.

There are a few thoughts regarding the 2021 fall chum salmon run as the season approaches that warrant a cautious approach to fall chum salmon management in 2021. The poor fall chum salmon run in 2020 was attributed to a well below average return of four-year-old fish, likely caused by an event that happened early in the marine phase of fall chum salmon from the 2016 brood year. That event will likely impact the five-year-old fall chum salmon returning in 2021, as they were also from the 2016 brood year. Also, you might recall that in 2016, there was a natural event in Kluane Lake, located in Canada's Yukon territory, that resulted in the substantial loss of fall

chum salmon spawning habitat. Kluane Lake, and the White River, a tributary of the Yukon River in Canada, accounts for, on average, 15% of the overall fall chum salmon production in the Yukon River drainage. Managers will be mindful of these events, and potential impacts to the fall chum salmon run in 2021.

Finally, the 2021 coho salmon run is expected to be average to below average. The average run size for coho salmon is about 240,000. Coho salmon runs tend to follow four to five-year cycles, alternating between higher and lower abundances. We appear to be entering the third year of a lower abundance cycle.

In closing, managers will know more about what to expect for the fall chum salmon run as the season approaches. The department will strive to keep fishermen up to date on events that will affect fall season via the weekly YRDFA teleconferences, Facebook, Advisory Announcements, and other means. As always, fishermen are more than welcome, and encouraged, to contact fall season staff by calling the Fairbanks office at 459-7274. Thank you, here's to a good fishing season to come and stay healthy! 🍷

YRDFA begins project to expand Anadromous Waters Catalog with help of Local Knowledge holders in Tanana River drainage

YRDFA is beginning a new project, in partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, in the Tanana River drainage. The goal of this project is to provide critical information for the management of salmon, whitefish, and resident freshwater species and the habitat that supports them. We will accomplish this through Local and Traditional Knowledge interviews and mapping activities with knowledgeable fishers and hunters from the community of Tanana, Manley Hot Springs, and Nenana in the first year of the project. Of particular interest is information on salmon and whitefish spawning and rearing areas. This will then be verified by helicopter and river boat field work and finally nominations of new waters will be submitted to the anadromous waters catalog. We look forward to working with these communities and we thank the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund for supporting this project. 🍷



Anadromous Waters Catalog crew working in jetboat.

Photo courtesy of Phill Stacey, ADF&G

Local and Traditional Knowledge of Salmon and Whitefish in the Yukon Flats with a focus on the Draanjik Basin

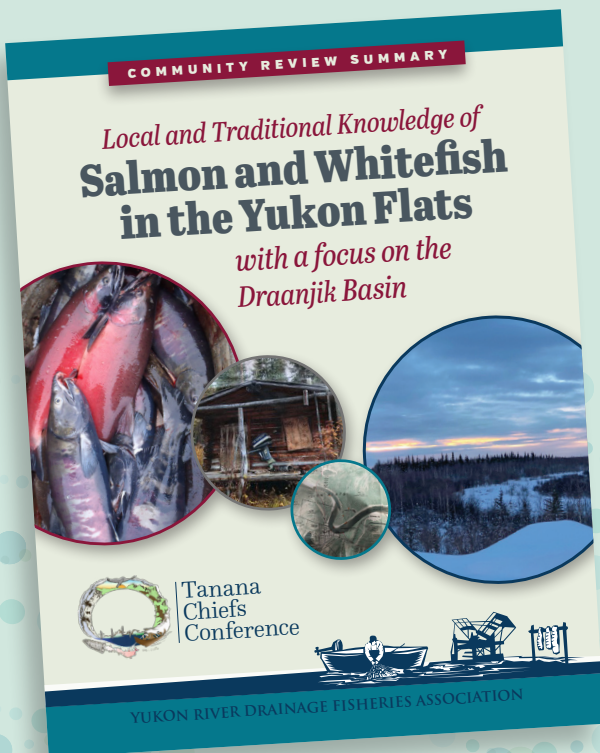
Three communities and 13 participants have provided important information about salmon and whitefish locations in the Draanjik drainage through this partnership project, funded by the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program. YRDFA and the Tanana Chiefs Conference have been working with the communities of Chalkyitsik, Fort Yukon and Venetie over the last few years. Due to Covid-related travel restrictions, our research team was unable to travel to the communities to conduct a community review. Thus, we produced a community review document, pictured below, for them to review and provide their feedback.

The purpose of this project is to provide information critical to the management of anadromous fishes and the habitat that supports them. This is being accomplished through Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) interviews and mapping activities with

knowledgeable fishers and hunters in the region to identify areas in the Yukon Flats and Draanjik basin with salmon and whitefish spawning and rearing areas. This will then be verified by helicopter and river boat field work and finally nominations of new areas will be submitted to the Anadromous Waters Catalog to protect critical habitat for these salmon species.

Biological fieldwork will take place this spring, summer and fall when TCC staff will be conducting aerial surveys in the upper Draanjik and Teedraanjik drainages to document rearing juvenile and spawning adult Chinook and chum salmon. Field work is also scheduled for the fall of 2021 to identify and locate a Coho salmon spawning area (Nèhdlijj Ni'inlii) that has not yet been added to the Anadromous Waters Catalog. This location has been identified by traditional knowledge and with positive eDNA analysis. If possible, the research team will travel

to each community in November to share the final results and collect community feedback. We anticipate completing the remaining biological field work by fall of 2021, and disseminating our results in early 2022. We thank the communities and the Office of Subsistence Management for their support and participation. 🍷



Thank you

We would like to commend the following YRDFA Delegation who have served on the Board.

30 YEARS

Richard Burnham

20+ YEARS

Lester Wilde
Victor Lord,
Phillip "Jeep" Titus
Stan Zuray

15+ YEARS

Mike Peters
Bill Alstrom
Bill Derendoff

10+ YEARS

Robert Walker
Pollock Simon, Sr.
Michael James
Fred Huntington
Charlie Wright
Andrew Firmin
Alfred Dementieff

2021 YRDFA Annual Board Meeting

The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association met in Fairbanks April 27-28, 2021. A key part of their meeting was discussion of their resolutions for 2021. The following are the resolutions that were discussed

PASSED:

2021-02 | Support the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery Conservation of Yukon River Chinook and Chum Salmon

YRDFA demands that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council take extreme action to protect Yukon River salmon species and reduce bycatch. YRDFA also requests that the NPFMC take action to adopt chum salmon bycatch measures to protect Western Alaska chum salmon runs.

2021-03 | Escapement Goals for One Full Lifecycle

YRDFA would like to see Yukon River salmon managed so that they meet escapement goals for one full life cycle.

2021-04 | Transboundary Mining in the Yukon River Watershed / Joining the SE Transboundary Coalition

YRDFA expresses its concern that these mines operate with no negative impacts to the environment and, particularly, no

impacts to water quality, aquatic life and habitat productivity and this should be tracked with baseline and ongoing studies.

2021-05 | Concern About Hatchery Production

YRDFA supports setting specific limits on hatchery production within Alaska and internationally.

2021-06 | Concern About Oil and Gas Development in the Yukon Flats

YRDFA recognizes that responsible economic development and jobs are essential but implores the permitting agencies to include appropriate terms and conditions in the permits to protect the Traditional/subsistence cultures and environment from advise impacts from oil and gas development and to seek surety bonds to protect against non-compliance of the permit stipulations.

FAILED:

2021-01 | Protecting the Yukon River: Opposing Oil and Gas Development in the Yukon Flats

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association opposes the exploration and development of oil and gas in the Yukon Flats. 🐟

Below: 2021 YRDFA board, alternates, and staff at annual board meeting in Fairbanks, April 27-28.



New fisheries and marine sciences program focuses on Indigenous knowledge

WRITTEN BY ALICE BAILEY

A new graduate traineeship program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks will broaden and diversify graduate education in fisheries and marine sciences through greater inclusion of Indigenous peoples and knowledge.

The National Science Foundation is providing \$3 million in funding through its National Research Trainee (NRT) Program, which is designed to encourage innovation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduate education training. Funding is also being provided by NSF's Navigating the New Arctic initiative. The traineeship will be part of the UAF College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences.

The program is called "Tamamta," which means "all of us" in the Sugpiaq and Yup'ik languages of the Indigenous peoples of Alaska's southcentral coast.

"Tamamta addresses a huge problem in Alaska – the exclusion and erasure of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems," said Courtney Carothers, a professor at CFOS, who is the principal investigator on the project.

The Tamamta program will fund four or five cohorts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous CFOS graduate students over the next five years.

Tamamta addresses a huge problem in Alaska—the exclusion and erasure of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems.

"It is our goal to elevate Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies to their rightful places as intact systems that can be offered alongside Western marine science and fisheries," said Jessica Black, a co-investigator and assistant professor at the UAF College of Rural and Community Development, who is Gwich'in.

Nearly 80 percent of CFOS fisheries graduates go on to work in state, federal and tribal resource management, so Tamamta students are likely to be part of the next generation of scientists and managers.

The First Alaskans Institute, the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are examples of partner organizations where students have opportunities to receive on-the-job training or do research.

Tamamta program activities and training are available to students, faculty, staff and agency partners. They include new team-taught interdisciplinary courses, an elder-in-residence program, a visiting Indigenous scholars program, cultural immersion experiences, professional development and cultural competency skill-building, hosted dialogues and art installations.

Tamamta was built by a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary group of faculty from CFOS, the College of Rural and Community Development, the College of Natural Science and Mathematics, and the Center for One Health Research.

For more information, contact Courtney Carothers at ccarothers@alaska.edu. 🐟



Photo by Michael Hardy

Shannon Hardy, left, and Jessica Black cut Łuk Choo (Chinook salmon) on the Yukon River. Black helped develop the new Tamamta graduate traineeship program at UAF's College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences.

TEAM DIRECTORY

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DISTRICT	NAME	COMMUNITY
Coastal, Seat 1	Lester Wilde	Hooper Bay
Y-1, Seat 1	Stanley Pete	Nunam Iqua
Y-1, Seat 2	Allen Hansen	Alakanuk
Y-1, Seat 3	Camille Augline	Alakanuk
Y-2, Seat 1	Bill Alstrom	St. Marys
Y-2, Seat 2	Mike Peters	Marshall
Y-2, Seat 3	Michelle Peterson	Mtn. Village
Y-3, Seat 1	Alfred Demientieff Jr.	Holy Cross
Y-4, Seat 1	Fred Huntington, Sr.	Galena
Y-4, Seat 2	Richard Burnham	Kaltag
Y-5, Seat 1	Charlie Wright	Rampart
Y-5, Seat 2	Stan Zuray	Tanana
Y-6, Seat 1	Tim McManus	Nenana
Y-6, Seat 2	Victor Lord	Nenana
Koyukuk River	Pollock Simon, Sr.	Allakaket
Flats, Seat 1	Jan Woodruff	Eagle
Canadian, Seat 1	James MacDonald	Whitehorse

YOUNG FISHERS REPS

DISTRICT	NAME	COMMUNITY
Lower River	Kerri Kelly	Pilot Station
Upper River	Katlyn Zuray	Fairbanks (Tanana)

ALTERNATES

DISTR./SEAT #	REPRESENTATIVE	COMMUNITY
Coastal, Alt. 1	Richard Tuluk	Chevak
Coastal, Alt. 2	Clifford Kaganak	Scammon Bay
Y-1, Alt 1	Paul Andrews	Emmonak
Y-1, Alt. 2	VACANT	
Y-2, Alt. 1	VACANT	
Y-2, Alt. 2	VACANT	
Y-3, Alt. 1	Basil Larson	Russian Mission
Y-4, Alt. 1	Dick Evans	Galena
Y-4, Alt. 2	Robert Walker	Anvik
Y5, Alt. 1	James Roberts	Tanana
Y-6, Alt. 1	Candace Charlie	Minto
Y-6, Alt. 2	Dorothy Shockley	Manley Hot Springs
Koyukuk River	William Derendoff	Huslia
Flats, Alt. 1	Rochelle Adams	Beaver
Canadian, Alt 1	Carl Sidney	Teslin

Yes!

I want to be a part of the United Voice on the Yukon River and support YRDFA!

Individual Membership:

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- \$75 newsletter subscription with beanie
- \$100 newsletter subscription with hoodie
- Other amount \$ _____

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