

**Yukon River Inseason Management Teleconference
Call #10 – August 3, 2010**

Facilitated by: Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

Funded by: USFWS – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel

Communities involved in the call: Emmonak, Mountain Village, Pilot Station, Marshall, Holy Cross, Allakaket, Galena, Tanana, The Rapids, Fairbanks, Fort Yukon, Circle, Dawson, Whitehorse, Teslin, Old Crow

Subsistence Reports: Fishing effort has been low through most of the river. Upriver, Eagle reports many fishers are finishing with their harvest of kings. Just a few people in Circle are fishing and there are not much fish. In Fort Yukon, most people have stopped fishing, others are winding down; not much fish has been caught this week. Downstream, Tanana and the Rapids report chums in the river, but fishing has been slow. From Galena to the coast, no one on the call reported any fishing activity. People are berry-picking and waiting to fish for fall chum. The kings are gone from the Tanana River. On the Koyukuk River, there is not much fishing effort and very few kings. On the Canadian side, Dawson reported a lot of fishing effort for very few fish. Whitehorse and Teslin are still waiting for the kings to arrive.

Water levels are rising in Pilot Station, Marshall, Holy Cross, Galena and Fort Yukon. They're dropping in the Tanana and Koyukuk Rivers, in the Canadian communities down to Circle and in Tanana. Debris levels were mostly reported as low, except in Tanana, Galena, and Fort Yukon where they were significant.

Management Updates:

ADF&G Assessment and Management Strategies: Summer season management of Chinook salmon is winding down. Escapement goals will continue to be monitored. As of August 2, Eagle sonar passage of Chinook salmon is 27,500 fish, which is well below average for this date. The summer chum salmon passage at Pilot Station is approximately 1.33 million fish. This run size provided for escapement and supported a normal subsistence harvest as well as a commercial harvest. Currently there are commercial periods in Y-6; cumulative commercial harvest in Y-6 through August 1 is 4,600 summer chum salmon.

Because of the low run size of Chinook salmon which did not provide enough fish for all users on the river, managers will be meeting with fishermen this winter to discuss how to approach management of next year's run.

Current Subsistence Fishing Schedule and Assessment Projects – please visit the ADF&G website at <http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region3/yukhome.php> for this information.

DFO Input: The projection from DFO for total border passage of Chinook salmon is 33,000 – 36,000 fish. This puts Canadian management deep into the Yellow Zone. There is no commercial fishing, the sportfishing quota is set to zero and Tatchun Creek will be closed to all angling. During a recent conference call between DFO and the First Nations, DFO explained the dire situation of the run and asked the First Nations to manage their fisheries appropriately. Possible actions by the First Nations will be to hold emergency community meetings or to visit fish camps to encourage reduction of harvests.

ADF&G Fall Chum Management: Based on run reconstruction through August 2, cumulative fall chum salmon passage at Pilot Station is estimated to be 116,000 fish, which is below the average for this date. The drift test fishery projects at Emmonak and Mountain Village substantiate the passage strength estimates. Fall chum salmon typically enter the river in erratic pulses, making inseason abundance projections highly variable until the midpoint of the run. No substantial pulse has entered the river yet. The midpoint of the run, on average, occurs around August 10 at Pilot Station. The current fall chum run projection is for 600,000 fish which should meet escapement and subsistence needs, as well as provide for a limited commercial harvest. Subsistence fishing is currently open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in Districts 1-5. This schedule will continue until further notice. Fishermen in Y-4 and Y-5 had requested additional fishing opportunity to supplement a poor Chinook salmon harvest. If the fall chum salmon run doesn't develop as expected, subsistence fishing time may be adjusted. Subdistrict Y-4A above the mouth of Stink Creek is open to drifting. No commercial periods have been scheduled; decisions on commercial fishing opportunity will not be made until at least the midpoint of the run.

Local Input & Closing Comments:

Comments this week touched on ADF&G summer management this summer and planning for next summer, fall chum salmon management, and the upcoming mesh size reduction. Callers from the Y-5 region expressed their gratitude that ADF&G listened and opened up more fishing time in their area. Other callers expressed their general displeasure that the Chinook salmon run did not meet the needs of everyone nor fulfilled treaty obligations with Canada. ADF&G responded that the run came in below the minimum preseason projections. There were not enough Chinook salmon this year to meet everyone's needs. The beginning of the run started with poor weather and low fishing effort, which ADF&G viewed as a de facto protection of that portion of the run; in hindsight a fishing period could have been pulled. As in years past, ADF&G will meet with fishers during teleconferences and in person public meetings this winter to discuss how to manage next year's run. It seems likely at this point that there will be something similar to 2009 for next year. A couple of callers expressed their opinion that the only way to really strengthen the Chinook salmon run is to not fish on it for a number of years.

As the Chinook salmon run did not provide for everyone's needs, fishers feel it is even more important to ensure that enough fall chum salmon make it to the upper river and across the border and wanted to know what measures ADF&G was taking to make sure that happened. DFO responded that the preseason projection for fall chum puts Canada in the Green Zone so they expect to meet First Nations fisheries needs, although it is still very early to make assessments of the run. ADF&G added that so far fishing pressure has been pretty light, but they are managing the run conservatively until they can make inseason assessments. Decisions on commercial periods will wait until at least the midpoint of the run. Other questions on fall chum management centered on the seemingly arbitrary date at which fish passage at Pilot Station changes from being counted as summer chum to fall chum salmon. ADF&G explained that based on genetics, what is being seen at Pilot Station is pretty typical for the fall run. The management plan is based on the July 16th date which takes into account that fall and summer chum are mixed together for a while during the transition.

The final question was about the mesh size reduction next year and if there was an effort to replace fishers' nets. A disaster declaration was made and money was appropriated. How the money gets distributed is still under discussion, but the involved parties will give an update next week. In the lower river, the CDQ group is replacing nets with the new mesh size.