

**Yukon River Inseason Management Teleconference
Call #11 – August 10, 2010**

Facilitated by: Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

Funded by: US Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel

Communities involved in the call: Kotlik, Mountain Village, St. Mary's, Pilot Station, Marshall, Nulato, Koyukuk, Galena, Tanana, The Rapids, Minto, Fairbanks, Fort Yukon, Circle, Eagle, Mayo, Whitehorse

Subsistence Reports: Fishing effort remains low through most of the river. Fishing activity was reported in Mayo, Fort Yukon, the Rapids and Koyukuk. Few fish are being reported. Whitehorse is still waiting for the kings to arrive and Circle residents are waiting for the fall chum to show up. A second small pulse of fall chum salmon was passing through the Rapids, where people are cutting them for people food.

Rainy and poor weather was reported in many communities on the call. Water levels are high or rising in the lower river, Galena, Nulato, Koyukuk, Fort Yukon and Circle. The Rapids and Whitehorse both report water levels as average for this date, and they are beginning to drop in Eagle and Mayo.

Management Updates:

ADF&G Assessment and Management Strategies: Summer season management of Chinook and summer chum salmon is winding down. Most Alaskan escapement goals were met but border passage goals into Canada will not be met. As of August 9, Eagle sonar passage of Chinook salmon is 32,800 fish, which is well below average for this date. There were high water issues for a few days at the sonar. The summer chum salmon passage at Pilot Station is approximately 1.33 million fish, providing a small surplus available for commercial fishing. The last commercial summer chum salmon harvest period occurred this week in Y-6. Total cumulative commercial harvest of summer chum salmon is 232,000.

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 – 35,000 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. DFO will be holding weekly teleconferences with First Nations to discuss the run and management strategies.

ADF&G Fall Chum Management: The fall chum run appears to be late and not off to a good start. Based on run reconstruction through August 9, cumulative fall chum salmon passage at Pilot Station is estimated to be 152,000 fish, which is below the average of 392,000 fish for this date. Fall chum salmon typically enter the river in erratic pulses, making inseason abundance projections highly variable until the midpoint of the run. The first pulse entered the river on August 6; its strength will be better understood as it passes the Pilot Station sonar. This may change the current projection which is for 300,000 – 437,000 fall chum salmon.

Subsistence fishing is currently opening 7 days a week, 24 hours a day in Districts 1-5. If the run does not develop as expected in a few days, subsistence fishing time may revert back to the original fishing schedule of 5 days a week in Y-4 and Y-5. No commercial fishing periods have been announced; if there is an identifiable surplus of fall chum salmon, decisions will be made then.

Local Input & Closing Comments:

Many callers wished to express their dissatisfaction with the possibility of ADF&G reverting Y-4 and Y-5 back to the 5 day per week schedule. As Y-1, 2, and 3 are on a 7 day a week schedule, it does not seem fair. Also, upriver districts had a very difficult time getting fish this summer and are relying heavily on the fall run to meet their winter food needs. In Tanana, people are fishing for people food right now; restricting fishing time will just make that more difficult for them but not save any fish. In September, people fish for dog food, which is different circumstances. ADF&G responded that the management plan as written is for the 5 day schedule in Y-4 and Y-5. Fishing time was liberalized because the preseason projection was for a sufficient run of fall chum salmon and because of fishers' requests and difficult summer fishing. As the fall run appears to be low right now, ADF&G feels it may be necessary to revert to the regulatory schedule. Another caller from Y-4 requested that if the schedule does revert to 5 days a week that weekends are included in the open fishing time. ADF&G said they would take the request into consideration if they alter the subsistence schedule.

There were a couple questions about where the fall chum and coho salmon go in the river system. The Canadian component of the fall chum salmon run is about 25-30% of the total. About the same percentage of fish head to the Tanana River and the remainder head to the upper Yukon to spawn. Very few fall chum salmon spawn in the lower river. The particular question asked of cohos was whether anyone counted the coho salmon heading up the Andreafski River. USFWS responded that the weir at the Andreafski used to operate into the fall, but it did not perform well and was not reliable. So there is no counting of coho salmon up that river anymore; run estimates rely on the lower Yukon test fisheries and Pilot Station sonar.

There have been multiple years in a row where the fall chum run did not come back as anticipated. This led to a number of questions about the quantity of fall chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea and Area M fisheries. Current numbers of fall chum salmon bycatch in the Area M fishery were not available on the call. In the Bering Sea fisheries, so far this year 9,000 chum salmon have been caught; this includes all chum salmon, not just those fish heading back to the Yukon River. There is a 5-year study currently being carried out that is looking at the genetic composition of near shore fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. The results of the study won't be out until 2012.

One caller wanted information on what happens to the tagged fish that are caught in test fisheries. Tagged fish are fish released from the Whitehorse hatchery; they are missing their adipose fin and have a coded wire tag in their head. ADF&G replied that if a tagged fish is caught in ADF&G projects the head is removed and sent to their lab in Juneau, where the information is then passed on to Whitehorse. If fishers catch a tagged fish and are near an ADF&G project, they can call and have the head picked up. DFO explained that there was a very small proportion of tagged fish out there, but wherever they are caught, in the ocean or in the river, the information is sent back to DFO.