

**Yukon River Inseason Management Teleconference
Call #7 – July 13, 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: Hooper Bay, Emmonak, Kotlik, Mountain Village, Pilot Station, Marshall, Holy Cross, Shageluk, Grayling, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, Allakaket, Wiseman, Galena, Ruby, Tanana, The Rapids, Fort Yukon, Circle, Eagle, Teslin, Mayo, Old Crow

Subsistence Reports: Communities in the lower river into the middle river are reporting being 75% - 100% done with subsistence fishing. Further upriver, communities are reporting poor fishing. Few families in the Koyukuk River are fishing due to high water and debris. While families in Galena are approaching meeting their subsistence needs, Koyukuk and Ruby are reporting a much worse year than last. Kings are beginning to turn color in Ruby. Tanana reports fishing has been poor with few families even half-way finished. The Yukon Flats also reports poor fishing and poor fishing conditions. The fish that have been caught, however, are reported as healthy looking with good color. No salmon have been reported in the mainstem Yukon in Canada, but a few Chinook salmon have been taken on the Porcupine River.

Water levels are high or rising throughout parts of the river. They are starting to go down in the Koyukuk River, some areas of the Fort Yukon / Flats region and in the Canadian stretches. Most communities reported fair to large amounts of debris in the water.

Management Updates:

ADF&G Assessment: All reported numbers are through July 12. The LYTF and Chinook salmon drift test fishery are both reporting below average cumulative Chinook salmon CPUEs. The summer chum drift test fishery cumulative CPUE is above average for this date. At Pilot Station sonar, 110,000 Chinook and 1,300,000 summer chum salmon have passed. This is below average for Chinook salmon and about average for summer chum salmon. The Rapids test fishery has caught 480 Chinook salmon, well below the average of 1,600 for this date and summer chum counts of 360 are well above the average of 75, however. Eagle sonar has counted 294 Chinook salmon to date, well below average. Age composition analysis of Chinook salmon shows 59.3% age-5 salmon and 33.8% age-6. Age-5 fish were more than twice the average for this date and age-6 fish were slightly more than half of the average. Females were 46.2%, 6 percentage points below average.

Run and Harvest Outlook: The Chinook salmon run appears to be below average to poor and weaker than the preseason projections. Age-5 fish dominate the run. It is anticipated that Alaskan escapement goals will be met, but there is concern for meeting escapement goals to Canada. The test fishery at the Rapids suggests low abundance of Canadian-origin fish.

Current projections are for 1.4 million summer chums past the Pilot Station sonar, which will provide for subsistence and escapement goals as well as a commercial harvest. Summer chum commercial fishing was delayed until 3/4 of the Chinook salmon run passed the lower river test fishery. To date, there have been 6 summer chum commercial periods in Y-1, 5 in Y-2 and 5 in Y-4a. The combined commercial harvests are 8,860 incidental Chinook and 153,100 summer chum salmon. Approximately 25% of the Chinook salmon was of Canadian origin (2,200 fish).

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.

USFWS Input: Subsistence activity has not been a good indicator of the salmon run strength so far this year because of debris load in the river and general fishing conditions. As of July 11, the Andraefsky and Gisasa weirs have counted 52,500 and 33,800 summer chum respectively, as of July 5. Both counts are above average. Chinook salmon counts are below average, with 1,100 salmon counted at Andraefsky and 370 salmon at Gisasa. The Henshaw River weir has counted approximately 45 Chinook and 7,200 summer chum salmon. The weir could not operate due to high water from July 9 – 11.

DFO Input: It is still too early to do an inseason projection of the Chinook salmon run. Management is currently in the Yellow Zone. The recreational fishery was closed at midnight on July 9; no fish were caught prior to that date. In this zone, there will be no commercial fishery in Canada and there could be restrictions to the First Nation fisheries, though none are currently anticipated. As there is better assessment of the number of salmon crossing the border, management strategies may change.

Local Input & Closing Comments:

The majority of comments this week were about possible restrictions on upriver fishers, as well as a few comments and questions on regulations, assessment projects and hatcheries. Many upriver fishers wanted to voice their concerns and disappointments over the possibility of fishing restrictions in order to meet escapement goals to Canada, in light of the fact that lower river fishers did not have extra restrictions and were allowed commercial fishing periods where Chinook salmon were incidentally caught. Many families are nowhere near meeting their subsistence needs and would like the opportunity to do so. In response to these comments, ADF&G said that as they were monitoring the run, it looked like it was going to be in the low end of the preseason projection. However as the run moved through it did not come in as expected. Currently the test fisheries at the Rapids are not showing numbers for the Canadian component that ADF&G would like. Additionally, commercial fishing on summer chums wasn't allowed until late in the season after 75% of the Chinook run had gone through. The majority of Chinook salmon harvested was of Alaskan origin (6,600), which is not of as much concern. ADF&G also responded with a question of their own asking if fishers can voluntarily reduce their harvest and focus on other species, such as chum, to get enough fish to Canada, or would it be better for management to pull a period.

Other questions this week included when the drifting period in 4a is scheduled to end and what the fishing schedule will be like afterwards. ADF&G responded that drifting will end at midnight on July 14, after which there will be two 48-hour periods per week. Management is not looking at extending the drift period because of their concern for Canadian-origin Chinook salmon. Another caller asked if the high water had affected the sonars. While Pilot Station has had good conditions at the sonar this year with low water most of the season, high water and debris required that ADF&G pull the Eagle sonar briefly. Finally, a caller asked for an update on hatchery production in the state. ADF&G gave a brief report on the status of requested increases in egg takes in Prince William Sound and Southeast Alaska and also reported on a predation study of mergansers in the Chena River that is being done by UAF. Contact ADF&G for more information on these topics.