

## **YRDFA Attends Fisheries Meetings in Emmonak and Fort Yukon**

*By Jill Klein, Executive Director*

YRDFA is the only organization that works riverwide to discuss salmon fisheries issues and hosts meetings where people from the entire length of the Yukon River can speak together. In addition to these riverwide meetings, it is also important to have regional and village meetings where local people from Yukon River fishing communities can meet with fisheries managers and each other to hold more focused discussions on regional and local issues.

### **Emmonak**

In mid-June I traveled to Emmonak, in the lower Yukon River delta, to convene a small fisheries get together with a few local fishers, Kwik'Pak (the locally owned and operated processor), and fisheries managers. The Emmonak Corporation donated the use of its conference room for the meeting. At the time, some people in the lower river had fished for their subsistence needs, but the weather was not good for fishing so there were also a lot of people who had delayed the start of their subsistence harvest efforts.

The meeting took place just before the three-quarter point of the Chinook salmon run, which is when commercial fishing was slated to start based on the pre-season projection. While there have been no directed Chinook salmon fisheries the past couple of years, the harvest has shifted more to summer chum salmon, made possible by promotional efforts that have led to an increase in market interest. The meeting enabled the fishers and processor to discuss how subsistence efforts have been going and how to handle incidentally caught Chinook salmon in the event of commercial openings for summer chum. Meeting participants talked about how many Chinook salmon might be incidentally caught and whether they would be sold or retained for subsistence uses (like they were last year).

While no decisions were made at the meeting, the following week the managers did announce a summer chum commercial period. Shortly thereafter, they quickly cancelled it due to the high numbers of Chinook salmon in the river. An opening was held one day later, when the risk of catching incidental Chinook salmon was lower. For more information on these openings, visit <http://csfish.adfg.state.ak.us/newsrelease/select.php?dist=YUS>.

### **Fort Yukon**

Fort Yukon is in the Yukon flats, where the river is braided into many channels, making it more difficult to catch salmon. In years past, subsistence fishing in this region been restricted when fish passage into Canada has been feared to be too low to meet treaty obligations. In the past two years, there have been some people that have not even had one salmon to eat.

The meeting in Fort Yukon was held in early July and organized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife in-season fisheries manager for the Yukon River. We wanted to meet with local fishers early in the season to prepare for the upcoming king salmon run. The meeting went well and there was good interaction between community fishers, tribal and community leaders, fisheries managers, and YRDFA. Again, no decisions were made at the meeting.

Due to high water and high debris, the upper portions of the Yukon River have had natural limitations on their ability to harvest their subsistence fish this year. Fisheries managers have asked fishers in this region to be conservative and to voluntarily restrict their harvest due to the fear of not meeting border passage this year. However, no subsistence restrictions have been put in place in the Alaskan portion of the Yukon River drainage, nor are any restrictions planned in this region.