

Collection and analysis of Yukon River DNA baseline samples in Alaska, 2012

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Contents

Abstract..... 3

Introduction..... 3

Objectives 4

Methods..... 4

Results and Discussion..... 5

Acknowledgements 6

References..... 6

List of Tables

Table 1. Location and numbers of adult Chinook salmon genetic baseline tissue samples collected from Alaska tributaries in 2012. 5

Table 2. Location and numbers of adult chum salmon genetic baseline tissue samples collected from Alaska tributaries in 2012. 5

List of Appendices

Appendix 1. Priorities for additional tissue sampling for adult Chinook baseline collections in US tributaries..... 7

Appendix 2. Priorities for additional tissue sampling for adult chum baseline collections in US tributaries..... 8

Abstract

The purpose of this project is to continue to develop and refine genetic baselines for Yukon Chinook and chum salmon stocks through collection and genetic analysis of tissue samples from representative spawning populations in the Yukon River. Continued development of the genetic baselines is necessary to obtain the most accurate allocations in mixed stock analysis, a critical tool for both inseason management and postseason evaluation of Yukon River salmon runs. This project involved collection of baseline Chinook and chum salmon tissue samples in Alaska and Canada, and inclusion of those samples into existing ADF&G and DFO baselines. Samples were collected from live fish, preserved in ethyl alcohol, and shared among three genetics laboratories (DFO, ADF&G, USFWS) which conduct mixed stock analyses of Yukon River salmon runs. This report covers samples collected and included in baselines in Alaskan tributaries only; Canadian sampling and baseline inclusions are reported separately. In 2012, a total of 66 Chinook salmon tissue samples were collected from 3 tributary spawning populations, and a total of 75 chum salmon tissue samples were collected from 2 Alaskan tributary spawning populations. Genotypes from these samples were analyzed and added to collections from the same locations from previous years. For Chinook salmon, the baseline estimate for one population was refined. For chum salmon, samples from other populations will be used to update baselines.

Introduction

Management of Chinook and chum salmon in the Yukon River requires differentiating between stocks originating from the various tributaries in both the US and Canada. Genetic stock identification is effectively used to distinguish country of origin and broad and fine scale stock groupings of Chinook salmon caught in the commercial and subsistence fisheries on the Yukon River (e.g. Decovich and Howard 2011). Chum salmon can be genetically differentiated into summer and fall runs, with broad scale stock groupings in each (Flannery et al. 2007). Fundamental to accurate genetic stock identification is the development of a comprehensive baseline genetic database which represents all spawning stocks that potentially contribute to the mixed stock run or fishery. Genetic baselines for Yukon salmon populations were originally constructed using allozyme markers starting in the late 1980s (e.g. Beacham et al. 1989). Single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNP) have been preferentially used as markers in the Chinook salmon baseline since 2004 (Smith et al. 2005), replacing the older allozyme database. At the beginning of the 2012 season, the Chinook baseline comprised 31 separate populations, and given adequate sample sizes, stocks can be identified to one of nine reporting groups (http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishinggeneconservationlab.yukonchinook_baseline). Similarly for chum salmon, a baseline using microsatellite markers was developed to replace the allozyme baseline around 2007 (Flannery et al. 2007). About 21 chum populations comprise the current chum baseline, from which stocks can be identified to one of two summer and two Alaskan and two Canadian fall chum reporting groups. Although not part of this project, a large number of Yukon chum salmon populations are also represented in the large Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Program (WASSIP) in the Coastal Western Alaska and Upper Yukon River reporting groups

(DeCovich et al., 2013).

Sampling salmon populations within the Yukon drainage for genetic baselines is logistically difficult due to the large number of genetically discrete spawning populations distributed over a vast and remote region. Timing of spawning periods can be variable, and flooding and turbidity during the spawning period may preclude sampling at all. For these reasons, samples are collected somewhat opportunistically, depending on run timing and environmental conditions, based on a priority list. Several years ago, the genetics sub-committee of the Yukon River Joint Technical Committee developed this prioritized list for baseline collections, and it is updated annually and used as a guideline to direct sampling efforts each season (Appendices 1 and 2). High priority areas for sampling are those which could serve to further differentiate between genetically distinct groups and which contribute substantial numbers of spawners to Yukon Chinook and chum returns overall. The R&E genetics baseline sampling project, funded by the Yukon River Panel since 2007, has relied upon consultants, contractors, and local resource users to obtain samples from priority areas each year. Genetic baseline tissue samples have also been contributed by other projects and funding sources, and samples may be collected opportunistically when another project is operating in an area from which samples are needed. Sampling may extend over a number of years to achieve sample sizes needed to distinguish among stock groups within an acceptable level of precision. Adding to and improving the Yukon Chinook and chum baselines is an ongoing process which will ultimately result in more accurate and timely management decisions.

Objectives

1. Collect axillary fin tissues appropriate for genetic (DNA) analyses from Chinook and chum salmon (primarily fall run), representing spawning populations under-represented in current genetic baselines, and
2. Incorporate the sample genotypes into the agency baselines.

Methods

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) hired two local contractors to collect Chinook and chum salmon tissue samples for genetic analysis from priority sites on Yukon River tributaries in 2012. Live fish, or recently deceased fish with red gills, were sampled on or near the spawning grounds, and portions of both pelvic axillary processes of each fish were removed. The sample size goal for each species and tributary location was to provide for a minimum of 50 fish, but 200 fish was considered optimal for accurate identification in the baseline. In practice, due to sparseness of spawning salmon in most locations, samplers collected as many samples as possible. Tissue samples were stored in paired bulk vials partially filled with anhydrous ethyl alcohol; paired axillary processes were divided between paired vials to ensure that both labs received tissue samples from the same fish. One vial from each pair was shipped to the Pacific Biological Station in Canada, and the other vial was shipped to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Gene Conservation Laboratory. Samples were also shared with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Conservation Genetics Laboratory. The samples were genotyped by

these laboratories and the genotypes were added to or included in existing baseline sample collections.

Results and Discussion

In 2012, a total of 66 Chinook salmon axillary process tissues samples were collected from 3 Alaskan tributaries (Table 1). The size of collections from individual tributaries was very small, primarily due to low numbers of spawners present. The samples size for the Middle Koyukuk River remains too small (<50 fish) to add these populations to the baseline. However, the samples collected from the Goodpaster River in 2012 increased the total collection sufficiently to add this Tanana tributary population into the baseline.

Table 1. Location and numbers of adult Chinook salmon genetic baseline tissue samples collected from Alaska tributaries in 2012.

Tributary (main)	Branch tributary	Number of samples	
		2012	All years
Koyukuk River	Middle Fork Koyukuk	15	38
	South Fork Koyukuk	1	57
Tanana River	Goodpaster River	50	131
	Totals	66	226

A total of 75 chum salmon tissue samples were collected from 2 Alaskan tributary locations in 2012 (Table 2). Fish from tributaries in the Koyukuk River comprised only summer chum salmon. Samples collected on the Jim River updated older baseline sample collections, and further collection intended to increase sample size is not warranted at this time.

Table 2. Location and numbers of adult chum salmon genetic baseline tissue samples collected from Alaska tributaries in 2012.

Tributary (main)	Branch tributary	Run	Number of samples	
			2012	All years
Koyukuk	Middle Fork	summer	25	66
	Jim	summer	50	300
Totals			75	366

Overall, sample collections in 2012 fulfilled important needs in the Yukon Chinook and chum salmon genetic baselines. One new population was added to the Chinook baseline, and collections were initiated and samples were added to existing collections from other high priority populations. Populations in the Colleen River and Black River will remain on the high priority sampling list (Appendix 1) and efforts will be made in the upcoming

seasons to obtain enough samples to increase the total collections to over 50 fish. These additions and refinements to the Chinook baseline improve our ability to identify distinct stocks in mixed stock samples from Yukon River fisheries. Genetic differences for Yukon River chum salmon are less than for Yukon River Chinook salmon; the greatest difference in chum salmon is between the two seasonal races or runs, summer and fall (Flannery et al. 2007). However, making the distinction between summer and fall runs, and also distinguishing between US and Canadian stocks within the fall runs, is critical for management. Samples collected in 2012 will serve to update the genetic database, and provide a start on adding new populations that could improve our understanding of Yukon chum genetic structure.

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Appendix 1. Priorities for additional tissue sampling for adult Chinook baseline collections in US tributaries.

Tributary (main)	Branch tributary	Priority	Comments
Anvik River		2	Additional samples would be helpful
Archuelinguk River		3	Low priority, but current samples not useable
Nulato River		1	Currently unrepresented
Koyukuk River			
	Jim Creek	1	
	Kateel River	1	
	South Fork Koyukuk River	1	
	Clear/Hogatza	1	
Melozitna River		1	Current samples are of questionable value
Tanana River			
	Chatanika River	2	
	Goodpaster River	2	
Beaver Creek		3	
Porcupine River			
	Sheenjok River	3	Currently have enough samples
	Colleen River	1	Additional samples needed
	Black	1	
Charley/Kandik/Nation		2	

Appendix 2. Priorities for additional tissue sampling for adult chum baseline collections in US tributaries.

Tributary (main)	Branch tributary/run	Priority	Comments
Archuelinguk		3	
Andreafsky	East Fork	3	
	West Fork	3	
Chulinak		3	
Innoko	California	3	
	Tolstoi	3	
Anvik	Beaver	3	
	Yellow	3	
	Swift	3	
	Otter	3	
	Canyon	3	
Kaltag		3	
Rodo		3	
Nulato		3	
Koyukuk	Gisasa	3	
	Dakli	2	
	Huslia	2	
	Clear	3	
	Henshaw	3	
	South Fork Late	1	
	South Fork Early	2	
	East Fork	2	
	Jim	1	
Melozitna		3	
Tozitna		3	
Tanana	Chena	2	

	Salcha	2
	Toklat mainstream	3
	Toklat - Sushana	3
	Toklat - Geiger	3
	Toklat - Downstream Geiger	3
	Clearwater	3
	Delta	3
	Bluff	3
Big Salt		1
Chandalar		1
Black		1
Porcupine		
	Sheenjek	1
