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2009 Yukon River Salmon Forecast and Management Strategies

(Juneau) – The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, released the 2009 Yukon River salmon return and management outlook today. The outlook provides information on expected salmon returns, management strategies, and potential harvests for the coming season and can be found at the following web address:

<http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region3/finfish/salmon/forecast/09yukstrat.pdf>

The summer chum, fall chum, and coho salmon returns to the Yukon River are expected to be of average strength and provide harvest opportunities for all users. Ability to harvest summer chum salmon, however, is likely to be constrained by ongoing Chinook salmon conservation efforts. Chinook salmon and summer chum salmon returns to the Yukon River overlap to a large degree.

Chinook salmon returns in 2007 and 2008 were unexpectedly weak and ADF&G scientists believe the 2009 return will be below average or poor as well. A small return of Chinook salmon will impose hardships on subsistence, commercial, personal use, and recreational harvesters, because of the central importance of Chinook salmon for both personal consumption and commercial harvest. Yukon River salmon managers and scientists are committed to doing everything in their power to reduce the hardships that users will endure in order to ensure escapement goals for Chinook salmon, especially for the Canadian spawning component. Chinook salmon that spawn in the Canadian portion of the Yukon River produce, on average, half the Chinook salmon returning to the Yukon River, and are subject to the highest exploitation rate of any Yukon salmon stock. Successful stewardship of this stock is necessary to prevent the current temporary hardships from becoming permanent.

ADF&G biologists have been meeting with Yukon River residents during the past six months to discuss the outlook for the 2009 season. The purposes of these meetings have been to present the biological data and reasoning upon which the 2009 outlook is based, to review the applicable Board of Fisheries regulations and management plans for the Yukon River, and to gather the ideas of local fishermen and processors regarding the best strategies for the 2009 season. These ideas have been carefully considered in the final preparation of the 2009 Yukon River Salmon Fisheries Outlook being released today.

Throughout the 2009 season, ADF&G managers will regularly update Yukon drainage residents and other interested parties on the status of the salmon returns to the Yukon River. These updates may be obtained from the ADF&G website (<http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region3/yukhome.php>). ADF&G will also

provide copies of its updates to state and local media outlets, particularly local radio stations. ADF&G managers also participate in the in-season teleconferences organized by the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association.

An extensive network of test fishery projects, sonars, weirs, and counting towers are operated to monitor salmon returns to the Yukon River in season. In addition, genetic sampling of Yukon River Chinook salmon is conducted at several stock assessment projects. As always, if information from the above projects indicates changes in fishing time and area are warranted, managers have the ability through their in-season management authorities to take whatever action is deemed appropriate. Since salmon returns are highly dynamic, changes in management often must be taken rapidly, however, ADF&G will strive to provide as much notice as possible regarding any changes to fishing areas and times.

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