



*Hazel Nelson*

*Co-Chairs*

*Steve Gotch*

*USA*

*Canada*

*Yukon River Panel 100 – 419 Range Road Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 3V1*

---

## **PRESS RELEASE: December 14, 2012**

**The management and harvest of Yukon River salmon stocks is the joint responsibility of American and Canadian governments with active participation from stakeholders, and is overseen by the Yukon River Panel ([yukonriverpanel.com](http://yukonriverpanel.com)). In 2012, the number of Yukon River Chinook salmon that reached the Canadian border fell far short of the escapement goal agreed upon by the Yukon River Panel. Despite the unprecedented fisheries management efforts implemented by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game – which included a complete closure of directed commercial fisheries and significant restriction of subsistence fishing periods for Alaska fishermen, harvest restrictions were insufficient to offset the poor overall return of Chinook salmon. Informed by the numbers of Chinook salmon entering into Canada, aggressive conservation efforts were implemented by both Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Yukon First Nations to enable the maximum number of salmon to reach spawning areas. In contrast to the weak Chinook salmon run, the fall Chum salmon run was very strong for most reaches of the watershed which allowed for both subsistence and commercial harvest openings throughout the mainstem Yukon River.**

The Yukon River Panel (The Panel) is established under the Yukon River Salmon Agreement pursuant to the Pacific Salmon Treaty, and consists of 12 Alaskan and Yukon Territory residents from throughout the Yukon River system. The Panel is supported by regional advisors, scientists and managers from Canadian and United States government agencies. The Panel met in Anchorage, Alaska from December 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> to review the status of the 2012 Yukon River salmon runs, management actions employed in both the US and Canada and to consider Restoration and Enhancement project proposals for 2013.

The preseason outlook for the 2012 run of Yukon River Chinook salmon was for a poor to below average run and as a result escapement was identified as the highest priority. In response, stringent US management actions were implemented to protect the Chinook salmon throughout the season.

The weak preseason forecast prompted the implementation of conservation measures on the US side which included ‘no directed commercial fishing’ for Chinook salmon and the delay of the

first commercial fishing period for summer chum until late in the Chinook salmon run. Chum salmon commercial fishing periods were strategically timed to occur in areas within the river when Chinook salmon numbers were low. In addition, the mesh size of nets was also restricted to six-inches or smaller later in the run. Chinook salmon harvested incidentally in the chum salmon fishery were not allowed to be sold and could only be retained by fishermen for personal or subsistence use. Inseason, additional subsistence fishing periods were closed to protect the first pulse and a portion of the second pulse of Chinook salmon (which are known to compose a significant proportion of Canadian origin fish).

Despite the numerous and aggressive restrictions placed upon the commercial and subsistence fisheries in Alaska, the escapement goal of between 42,500 and 55,000 Chinook salmon entering into Canada was not achieved. The final tally of Chinook salmon counted at the Eagle sonar site located near the US/Canada border was 34,656 while total escapement into Canada was determined to be 32,656.

The low level of Chinook salmon returns over the last five years has resulted in a considerable reduction in harvest by Yukon First Nation people to enable as many fish as possible to reach spawning areas in the upper Yukon River watershed in Canada. During the 2012 season Yukon First Nation people chose to voluntarily implement highly restrictive measures with a total estimated harvest of < 2000 Chinook salmon (this amounted to less than 25% of subsistence needs). All commercial, domestic, and recreational fisheries for Yukon River Chinook salmon were closed in Canada for the entire 2012 season.

The fall chum salmon run exceeded the lower end of the preseason forecast of 986,000 to 1,242,000 fish with a total estimated number of 1,114,000 fish entering the Yukon River. The strong run enabled for subsistence and commercial fisheries on the U.S. portion of the Yukon River drainage. The commercial harvest of 289,000 fish was the second highest US harvest of fall chum salmon in the Yukon River on record. The estimated count of chum salmon at the Eagle sonar was 141,648, with an estimated spawning escapement of 137,743 which achieved the spawning escapement goal of 70,000-104,000 fish for the mainstem Yukon River. The escapement of fall chum into the Fishing Branch River of the Porcupine River sub-watershed met the escapement goal of 22,000 to 49,000 fall chum with 22,399 adult chum salmon counted at the Fishing Branch River weir. The strong return of chum into the Canadian portion of the Yukon River mainstem allowed for a First Nation fishery as well as several commercial openings. Yukon First Nation people harvested an estimated 700 fall chum salmon while the commercial fishery harvested 3,171 in the mainstem of the Yukon River. The First Nations harvest at Old Crow (Porcupine River sub-watershed) was 3,905 fall chum salmon.

In addition to promoting the conservation and coordinated management of salmon originating in the Canadian portion of the Yukon River watershed, The Panel administers the Restoration and Enhancement Fund. Since 2002, the Panel has allocated over \$US 10 million to community-based projects, including stewardship activities which directly support the management and recovery of Yukon River salmon stocks originating in Canada. In 2012 projects included test fisheries and population monitoring projects in Mountain Village and Rampart-Rapids in Alaska; in addition to numerous projects occurring in Yukon communities along the Canadian portion of the Yukon River mainstem and the Porcupine River tributary. These communities included Dawson City, Mayo, Minto, Old Crow, Teslin and Whitehorse.

Restoration and Enhancement projects in 2012 involved the application of technologies to support fisheries management and included advanced genetic stock identification technology and salmon run assessment techniques using sonar stations at the US-Canada border and within the Canadian portion of the Yukon River system. These projects assist with monitoring the escapement objectives set by The Panel and also contribute to formulating long range plans and refining priorities for future restoration and enhancement efforts.

At its spring meeting, which will be held in Whitehorse in March 2013, the Panel will allocate approximately \$US 1 million for Restoration and Enhancement Fund projects to be carried out in both Alaska and Yukon Territory in 2013. In addition, The Panel will also review specific escapement guidelines for the management of the Chinook and fall chum salmon stocks for the upcoming 2013 season.

Contact: Hazel Nelson: 907-267-2190;

Steve Gotch: 867-393-6719