



Elizabeth Andrews PhD
USA

Co-Chairs

Frank Quinn
Canada

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

PRESS RELEASE, January 12, 2009

Lower than expected return of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon a major concern at semi-annual meeting of the international Yukon River Salmon Panel in Anchorage.

The Yukon River Panel, established by the US/Canada Yukon River Salmon Agreement, met in Anchorage on December 8 through 12 to review the status of the 2008 salmon runs and the management actions utilized in 2008. The Panel also considered research proposals for 2009.

The 2008 run of Yukon River Chinook salmon stocks of Canadian origin Yukon Territory was late and weaker than anticipated. The Panel review of the Chinook salmon run and fisheries found that conservation of these salmon stocks required the very conservative management measures that were implemented in 2008. Fisheries managers closed commercial fishing in US and Canada; reduced fishing time in the subsistence fisheries in the US and in lower river districts allowed only smaller mesh gillnets; reduced the sport fishing bag limit in the US; closed sport fishing in Canada; and Canadian First Nations voluntarily reduced aboriginal fishing by more than 50 percent. Even with these severe reductions, spawning escapement of Canadian-origin Chinook was 27 percent below the interim management escapement goal of 45,000.

During the meeting, the Panel heard a presentation from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council on the draft environmental impact statement on bycatch of Chinook salmon in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery. The Panel reiterated its concern to the Council regarding marine catches of Yukon salmon stocks and urged action by the Council to take all measures necessary to reduce bycatch to the lowest levels similar or lower than those existing at the signing of the Yukon River Salmon Agreement in 2002.

Based on reports from the Panel's Joint Technical Committee, the 2009 Chinook salmon run is expected to be poor. As a precautionary approach, Panel members and managers will be gathering input from local fishermen regarding salmon management strategies and options to assist in getting adequate numbers of Canadian-origin Chinook to the spawning grounds. The

Panel approved an outreach effort to be conducted between January and May, prior to the fishing season, to obtain recommendations. This is expected to be a challenging endeavor; and extremely important for sustaining future runs.

Since signing of the Yukon Agreement in 2002, the Panel has set an example for cooperation in the sharing and management of international salmon stocks. The Panel, which operates under the umbrella of the Pacific Salmon Treaty, consists of 12 Alaska and Yukon Territory residents from throughout the Yukon River system, and is supported by regional advisers and scientists and managers from Canadian and United States agencies.

The Panel has allocated over \$2 US million since 2002 to community-based projects, including stewardship projects, directly supporting the management and recovery of Yukon River salmon stocks originating in Canada. In 2008, these projects included test fisheries and population monitoring projects in Marshall, Kaltag, and Ruby in Alaska; and in communities within the Yukon drainage in Yukon Territory, both along the Yukon River mainstem and tributaries, such as the Porcupine River. These communities include Dawson, Mayo, Minto, Old Crow, Teslin, and Whitehorse.

Other restoration and enhancement projects involve the application of technologies to support fishery management. These projects include advanced genetic stock identification technology and salmon run counting techniques using sonar stations at the US-Canada border and within the Canadian portion of the system. All have assisted with monitoring the escapement objectives set by the Panel.

At its spring meeting in March, the Panel will allocate \$US1 million for salmon and habitat Restoration and Enhancement Fund projects in both Alaska and Yukon Territory and establish specific escapement guidelines for the management of the Chinook and fall chum salmon stocks in 2009.

Contact: Frank Quinn 867-393-6719