



Elizabeth Andrews PhD
USA

Co-Chairs

Frank Quinn
Canada

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

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Expected low return of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon in 2009 a major concern at bi-annual meeting of the international Yukon River Salmon Panel.

The Yukon River Panel, established by the US/Canada Yukon River Salmon Agreement, met in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory from March 25 through 28, 2009. The focus of the meeting was to review the outlook for 2009 salmon returns, establish specific escapement guidelines for the management of the Chinook and fall chum salmon stocks in 2009, and discuss potential fishery management actions to ensure Chinook salmon escapement goals will be achieved during the upcoming season. The Panel also made funding decisions regarding Yukon River restoration and enhancement projects for 2009.

Based on data compiled by the Panel's Joint Technical Committee, the 2009 Chinook salmon run is anticipated to be below average to poor. The Panel review of the Chinook salmon run outlook found that conservation of these salmon stocks will require very conservative management measures in 2009 to ensure an adequate return of Chinook salmon into Canada. Fishery managers are gathering input from local fishermen regarding salmon management strategies and options to assist in getting adequate numbers of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon to the spawning grounds. The Panel also has initiated an outreach effort to obtain recommendations from resource users prior to the 2009 fishing season on measures that may be used to conserve Chinook salmon while having the least impact on subsistence uses. This is a challenging endeavor which is extremely important for sustaining future runs.

During the March meeting, the Panel discussed the draft environmental impact statement on bycatch of Chinook salmon in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. The Panel will reiterate its concern to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council regarding marine catches of Yukon salmon stocks and urge action by the Council to take all measures necessary to reduce bycatch to low levels at the Council's meeting in early April.

Since the signing of the Yukon Agreement in 2002, the Yukon River 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.

Through a Restoration and Enhancement Fund program, 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. For 2009, the Panel approved approximately \$1 million (US) in projects for salmon and habitat restoration and enhancement in Alaska and Yukon Territory. The community-based projects include a subsistence fishery monitoring project in Ruby, Alaska and projects in communities within the Yukon drainage in the Yukon Territory, both along the Yukon River mainstem and in tributaries such as the Porcupine River. Community projects will take place Dawson City, Mayo, Old Crow, Teslin, and Whitehorse, Yukon.

Other restoration and enhancement projects involve the application of technologies to support fishery management. 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 these activities have assisted fisheries management and the monitoring of attainment of salmon population escapement objectives set by the Panel.

Contact: Frank Quinn 867-393-6719