

Yukon River Panel, Communications Committee
Project CC-01-13

Yukon River In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences
Final Report

Jill Klein

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association
725 Christensen Drive, Suite 3-B
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

for:

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

May 2014

A publication of the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, funded by the Yukon River Panel,
Project CC-01-13

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views the funding entity.

Study History: The Yukon River is the longest river in Alaska, originating in western Alaska at the Bering Sea coast and moving through interior Alaska to the border just past Eagle into the Canadian headwaters. There are over 45 rural communities along the Yukon River in Alaska and about 10 communities in the Canadian headwaters that rely on the salmon resource. They need access to consistent and updated information on the management assessment projects carried out by state and federal fisheries agencies. Additionally, fisheries managers benefit from talking directly with fishermen who are on the grounds; they share information about water levels, fishing conditions, harvest goals, fish quality and other details that help the managers with their management decision making on a weekly basis. Teleconference calls during the salmon season were initiated by the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association a practical and useful method for discussing the complexities of salmon management and for gaining immediate real-time information from fishers along the expanse of the Yukon River.

Abstract: The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) hosted weekly in-season teleconference calls during the 2013 Yukon River salmon fishery season, from June through August. The teleconference calls, held every Tuesday at 1 p.m. Alaska time (2 p.m. Yukon time), were a means to exchange information on run timing, abundance, and escapement data; discuss management strategies; facilitate open dialogue between users and management entities; and enable salmon resource users drainage-wide to communicate. In addition to reports of local observations, the calls provided information to fishers regarding research and escapement monitoring tools operated by management entities, and facilitated information sharing and capacity building amongst all interested parties. Calls were typically 1-2 hours in length. Summaries of each call were written and distributed to teleconference participants following the calls.

The Yukon River Panel and the Fisheries Resources Monitoring Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management both fund the Yukon River in-season salmon management teleconferences.

Key Words: Alaska, Canada, Chinook, chum, commercial fisheries, fisheries management, in-season management, salmon, subsistence harvest, teleconference, Yukon River, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association.

Citation: J. Klein, 2014. Yukon River In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences. Yukon River Panel: CC-01-13. Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, Anchorage, Alaska.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its inception in 1994, the in-season management teleconference program has provided a practical and useful method for fishers, processors, managers, and other stakeholders in Yukon River salmon fisheries to discuss the complexities of salmon management and gain immediate real-time information across the more than 2,000 mile expanse of the Yukon River. Facilitated by the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA), these teleconferences have enabled local users to provide valuable insight to fisheries managers on in-season salmon subsistence needs, river conditions, and abundance and quality of salmon available. In addition to reports of local observations, the calls have provided information to fishers regarding research and monitoring tools operated by management entities, and have facilitated information sharing and capacity building amongst all interested parties.

STUDY AREA

The Yukon River drainage

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this program are:

1. Promote, coordinate, facilitate, and summarize weekly in-season management teleconferences in the summer of 2013 for fishers, managers, processors, and other stakeholders in Yukon River drainage fisheries.
2. Provide a forum for sharing information and ideas, building understanding and capacity, among all user groups in the Yukon River drainage.

METHODS

Pre-Season

To organize and carry out weekly teleconference calls during the 2013 summer and fall fishing season, YRDFA first looked back at the 2012 teleconferences, to see what worked and what did not. Also, YRDFA consulted managers from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). All parties agreed that the calls needed to focus on in-season issues, rather than external factors such as bycatch, to keep calls shorter and more productive. One idea to alleviate this was to schedule specific calls with invited guests to talk specifically about salmon by-catch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. Guest speakers were met with to discuss how this would be done. Other areas related to the calls such as the phone number, duration of calls, agenda items and meeting formats would remain the same.

The pre-season promotional work has been minimized due to funding considerations as well as the fact that the in-season salmon management calls are well known along the Yukon River. The calls have been operational for over eleven years and there are many people, Tribes, First Nations, state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations that are well aware of the calls. A minimal amount of advertising was carried out in the YRDFA newsletter mailed out

to over 2,000 households in the Yukon River drainage and some advertisements in the Delta Discovery in conjunction with Doug Molyneux who supports efforts to have Alaskan subsistence users turn in their harvest reporting calendars. Our ads were run jointly. One 8 x 11 color poster was mailed out to the same mailing list that receives our newsletter with the specific teleconference information on it such as time of the call; call in number, agenda items and reporting format were also listed. Further, staff distributed decks of promotional playing cards and promotional filet knives at meetings and during travel on the river throughout the winter and spring; these items were purchased at the end of the 2011 teleconference season and we used the remaining supplies.

In-Season

From June 4 to August 27, 2013, teleconference calls took place. The YR DFA executive director, Jill Klein facilitated the in-season salmon management teleconferences from June through August 2013, every Tuesday at 1 p.m. Alaska time (2 p.m. Yukon time). Each call lasted between 45 and 120 minutes, depending on the level of participation and amount of discussion. A brief summary of each call was written and emailed to teleconference participants following the calls. The summaries were also posted on the YR DFA website.

Post-Season

YR DFA carried out reporting at various meetings such as the Yukon River Panel meetings at communications committee reports and also in written reports to the Office of Subsistence Management who also fund the teleconferences.

RESULTS

This year YR DFA held 14 in-season management teleconferences, every Tuesday in June, July, and August. The calls followed an agenda each week: opening with subsistence fishing reports; hearing from state and federal fisheries managers on their fishery assessments and management strategies; hearing from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in Canada and Yukon fishers in the Canadian headwaters. These teleconferences are funded through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and the Yukon River Panel.

The important issues addressed this season during the teleconferences included the low Yukon River Chinook salmon runs and the conservative management strategies used in-season, salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock fishery and also the Magnusson Stevens Act reauthorization.

In river Chinook salmon fisheries were managed conservatively and this was a major discussion point each week; how the run was coming in and when pulse closures would take place and what gear restrictions were in place. People were concerned about the restriction to 6-inch gear as many people did not have it and did not have time or money to purchase it. People also wanted to harvest king salmon because it is so important to them and there were a lot of discussions around this.

Others were concerned about how the information is shared from the teleconferences and YR DFA assured the public that the concerns raised on the calls would be shared in the final

report for this project as well as at public Forums like the Yukon River Panel meeting, who also supports this project objective with funding.

The purpose of the in-season salmon management calls is to talk about in-river fisheries management. But over the years, we have seen people ask a lot of questions and make a lot of comments on the issue of salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea. In order to address the need to discuss this important issue, we dedicated two calls, one at the beginning (the first call) and one towards the end of the season in August, where we dedicated half of the teleconference to talking about salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock fishery. We had guest speakers from the North Pacific Fisheries Management staff (Diana Stram) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's commissioners office and Council seat alternative to the Commissioner Nicole Kimball to discuss this important issue impacting Western and interior Alaska salmon stocks.

We also learned about the Magnuson Stevens Act reauthorization process that is being headed up by Senator Begich's office. This was useful to learn about the act, the process of reauthorization on a national scale, and how to give input to the process.

Summaries for each teleconference provided highlights on fishers' reports, questions, and comments, along with key management updates. These summaries were shared with teleconference participants and other interested parties through email.

The calls did have their fair share of line problems due to the increased use of cell phones joining the teleconferences. This was a regular issue on the calls and we needed regular operator assistance to drop lines and mute lines. This was confusing for participants and YRDFA had to regularly remind people about this during the season of teleconference calls.

Measure of Success

The project deliverables were met. YRDFA carried out all the teleconferences in-season to give fisheries managers and local fishing communities the opportunity to learn information from each other in-season about the fishing conditions. There was a sharing of information and ideas and in certain cases there was a building of understanding and capacity. This was done through consistent conversations that took place between fishers and managers on the status of the Chinook salmon run during the 2013 season and a repeated effort by fishermen to continue to want to fish and ask to fish while management had to continue to discuss the need for conservation. While it is hard to measure this, with repeated effort to discuss this over the salmon season there is the assumption that it started to make sense to people. There may have been people who did not agree with this or understand and support it. It is difficult during a public call to build understanding with a constantly changing participation base.

Progress towards completion is measured in the number of calls that take place and the topics covered during the calls. In the effort to stay focused on the topic at hand, the salmon bycatch focused call was a success in having the issue addressed head on at the beginning of the season and then again at the end of the season. This enabled more focused discussions to take place the remainder of the season. The calls are not formally evaluated. In the past the number of lines used and the number of villages participating was measured. This data is still collected but due to a staffing shortage at YRDFA this past summer due to a resignation, YRDFA decided not to analyze this information this year. As well, this quantitative information about the participation

is useful to ensure that we are still getting a consistent participatory base from which managers can share information with and also gather information from the people on the river. At this time, after many consecutive years of this program, it seems that the focus is not on the levels of participation and when people participate. We have learned this information over time and it has remained relatively consistent. What is interesting now to possibly measure is the part of our objective to build understanding and capacity. The teleconferences are part of an annual process of building understanding and capacity at various meetings. Unfortunately not all of the same people participate in the winter meetings as in the summer in-season management teleconferences. The calls enable other people to call in and they may not be as informed about the status of the salmon stocks and the pre-season management outlooks and plans. This leads to a dynamic on the teleconference that is dynamic and always changing. The YRDFA executive director was the main facilitator of the calls and she tried to remain flexible and ready for the unexpected and unique questions and comments that may take place on the calls. With no external evaluation formally taking place, it is hard to determine the success of the calls from season to season. YRDFA staff does receive feedback from the state and federal managers in preparation for each season and this was taken into consideration this past season as well.

The tangible benefits from this project are that a regular call took place each week in a standard time and format for the general public to call into. The calls provide a place for fishing communities and managers to utilize to share information. These calls are not the only place to do this, but the public, including state and federal agencies and legislative offices that are not announced on the call know that this call is regularly scheduled and they can call in to hear an update on the salmon returns to the Yukon River and the test fisheries data and assessment projects. The calls are also a gauge for how much information the public has received pre-season and how informed they were going into the season. The season before the 2013 calls took place did not have a pre-season summer preparation meeting. The fisheries managers felt that the discussions on the calls at times related to the request to fish and the statements that they were not prepared to have to use 6-inch gear led the managers to believe that this was due to inadequate pre-season information sharing. Overall the teleconference calls continue to be widely utilized and will be refined from year to year and based on current issues needing to be addressed.

Financial Statement

This project was fully spent out. The budget detail does not give a full picture of the entire cost of the project because there is an additional funder and their support is not on this budget detail. If the funder would like to see the entire costs of the project, we can submit this for your review.

CONCLUSIONS

While the teleconferences continue to operate and provides a significant amount of people with a place to call into on a weekly basis, it would be good to do an evaluation on an annual basis. The YRDFA staff or an external person could do this; one could track and monitor the calls with respect to the topics discussed and the way management responds and if it seems like understanding and capacity building is taking place. This would be helpful for improving performance of the calls and for improving the capacity of people along the Yukon River to continue to have a productive participation in fisheries management decision-making.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

YRDFA would like to thank the Yukon River Panel and the Fisheries Resources Monitoring Program for their support of the in-season salmon management teleconferences. In addition to our funders, YRDFA would like to thank to everyone who participated in the 2013 weekly teleconferences, whether this was their first season or they've been calling for years. A strong, regular presence from all stakeholders—fishers, managers, Tribes, First Nations, processors, inter-tribal consortiums, and others—maximizes the effectiveness and utility of the calls and goes a long way in building understanding of the run in real time throughout the drainage.