

Yukon River Panel
Project CC-03-12

Yukon River Summer Season Preparedness Process
Final Report

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for:

Yukon River Panel

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Abstract: Preseason projections suggested that the 2012 Yukon River Chinook salmon run would be below average to poor. As such, it was deemed that conservation measures to protect the future health of the run would likely be necessary. Couple this with unprecedented restrictions in recent years and not meeting international escapement goals in three of the last five years, and there rose a clear need to inform fisheries stakeholders and involve them in discussions regarding management of the 2011 run. With funding and direction from the Yukon River Panel, the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) hosted a riverwide meeting on April 4, 2012 for Alaskans to discuss the Chinook salmon run and best approaches for handling it, both this season and in the future.

Key Words: Alaska, Chinook salmon, fishers, salmon, subsistence, Yukon River, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA), Yukon River Panel.

Citation:

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INTRODUCTION

Preseason projections suggested that the 2012 Yukon River Chinook salmon run would again be below average to poor. As such, it was deemed that conservation measures to protect the future health of the run would likely be necessary. Building on similar efforts from 2009, 2010, and 2011, it was again important to inform fisheries stakeholders of the situation and include them in the further refinement of a plan to handle any shortfalls.

Given the breadth of communications efforts on this topic over the past three years, stakeholders are already well informed and well versed regarding poor salmon returns. As such, reducing the public pre-season plan development process from a combination of teleconferences and meetings to one riverwide meeting for all Alaskan stakeholder groups was deemed the most efficient and economical approach for stakeholder involvement this year. These groups include Tribal Councils, Regional Advisory Councils to the Federal Subsistence Board, the Yukon River Panel, Inter-Tribal Groups, processors, and the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association. Such a meeting would be meaningless without buy-in and dedicated involvement by managers from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Alaska Department of Fish & Game; as such, they were heavily involved throughout the process. The same process was successfully adopted in 2011.



End results of this project included an increased awareness and understanding of the current status of the salmon fishery throughout the Alaskan portion of the Yukon River drainage, stakeholder involvement in the management of their fishery, a prioritized list of specific management approaches for responsibly addressing any shortfalls in the 2012 Chinook salmon run, and stakeholder feedback regarding the King Salmon Management Plan.

METHODS

Invitations and Informational Packet

For a one-day meeting with numerous stakeholders to be effective, those stakeholders must be present, informed, and prepared. To this end, YRDFA worked with fisheries managers to develop a detailed invitation packet (Appendix A) for all 47 Tribal Councils. This packet included:

1. An introductory letter that discussed in brief the purpose of the meeting.

2. An eye catching, high quality invitation, formatted much like a wedding invitation, complete with postage paid reply card, designed to differentiate it from other information received daily by Tribal offices and give the event an air of importance.
3. A list of questions for Tribal Councils to consider in advance of the meeting. These questions would be discussed at the meeting, and would set the tone for the event.
4. Background information to provide more detail for the list of questions.
5. A flyer from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about Chinook salmon run strength and the need to rebuild the stocks.



These packets were mailed to all Tribal offices five weeks before the meeting to give Tribal Councils adequate time to meet and discuss the topics presented and elect a representative to attend.

Additionally, through emails, phone calls, presentations, and personal invitations at various stakeholder meetings, staff invited representatives from other stakeholder groups, including the 3 Regional Advisory Councils to the Federal Subsistence Board, the Yukon River Panel, the 3 Inter-Tribal Groups, the 3 processors, and the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association. These representatives were provided similar

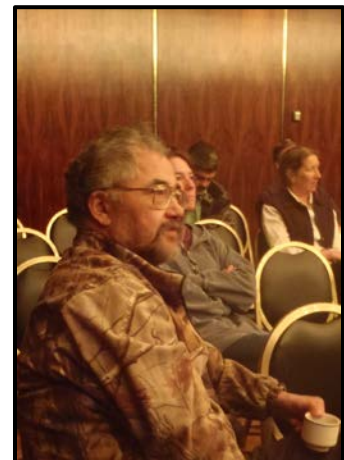
information to that sent to Tribal offices. A number of agency personnel with a wide range of expertise were asked to participate, as well.

Meeting

The meeting was set for April 4, 2012 at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage—the same city and time of year as the previous two riverwide pre-season meetings. Participants had expressed a preference for meeting in Anchorage in the past, and rates are still reasonable this time of year.

YRDFA staff reserved meeting space, coordinated catering, contacted all invitees for information on each representative, coordinated travel, and arranged for sound and recording.

At the same time, staff worked with representatives from ADF&G and USFWS to develop the agenda (Appendix B) and to hone the list of management options that should be considered by participants (Appendix C), beyond the basic strategies that have been developed over the past few seasons. These options involved restricting fishing to federally qualified users, voluntary reductions and associated planning, and sale of incidentally caught king salmon in the summer chum commercial fishery. Additionally, staff set up four break-out educational sessions on timely topics of interest. These topics were salmon science, fall chum salmon management, harvests and subsistence law, and a commercial processors panel.



Further, staff arranged the meeting structure for maximizing input and participation from the large number of attendees. The primary approach involved dividing participants into groups at separate tables, each with a dedicated note taker who could also answer questions about management. After each management option was presented, participants would discuss the issue in detail within their groups, and the note takers would capture the discussion and report on the opinions presented. Managers would use this input to finalize the pre-season plan on site and present it to attendees. The same format was used for gathering feedback related to an ongoing revision of the King Salmon Management Plan; YRDFA would use the input to hone the details of that revision.

The meeting and pre-season plan were summarized in YRDFA's newsletter and e-news, agencies distributed the pre-season plan to Tribal Councils, city offices, and others through faxes and press releases, and feedback on the King Salmon Management Plan was factored in to the revision process by YRDFA.

RESULTS



All told, at least 85 people participated in the meeting. This included representatives from 35 Tribes, 3 Inter-Tribal organizations, 3 Regional Advisory Councils, 3 processors, the Yukon River Panel, YRDFA, and other concerned fishers. In terms of number of attendees, this precisely paralleled the 2011 meeting, which boasted the highest level of attendance for this riverwide meeting since the program began in 2009. In terms of number of groups represented, this was the most successful rendition of this meeting to date.

Attendees heard the outlook for the 2012 salmon runs, and they gave input into how to manage the run. Broad management approaches and very specific tools and scenarios were discussed. The agenda was ambitious, yet the separate-groups format of the meeting allowed for great depth of discussion and building of understanding and relationships while still keeping the meeting to one day.

State and federal managers used the input from participants to develop the pre-season plan, which was presented at the end of the meeting. Not everyone agreed on every point, but everybody provided input and shared their views on each issue.

Education Sessions were provided on 4 topics. Participants had the option of attending 2 out of those 4. Of the three topics, harvests and subsistence law was the most popular.

A detailed summary of the meeting and the education sessions on fall chum salmon management and harvests and subsistence law can be found in Appendix D.

Financial Statement: Budgeted Versus Actual Expenditures

The budget matched up quite well to the actual expenditures, with three exceptions: meeting room rental, airfare, and cab fare. These last two items caused a budget overage that had to be covered through another grant.

The meeting room rental was lower than expected—it was waived due to the amount of catering ordered for the meeting. This was not standard practice at the usual venue, which typically offers slightly cheaper lodging but always charges for meeting space, but it was a welcome policy. The usual venue was already booked for all conceivable dates for this event, but the new venue was reasonably competitive in pricing (though slightly higher).

The airfare was higher than budgeted due to a very recent increase in gas prices. Not only was it higher per traveler than last year's meeting, it was higher than the last riverwide meeting YR DFA held, which was in February 2012, making it tremendously challenging to anticipate. YR DFA used its long-standing relationship with Era Aviation to have the price reduced as much as possible, but it was still higher than anticipated. The only methods to reduce it further would have been to un-invite attendees or require them to pay a portion of their travel, and both of these options would have decreased attendance and negatively impacted the outcome of the event.

Additionally, the usual venue for this meeting is one of the last in Anchorage to offer an airport shuttle, so no cab fare had been budgeted. As noted above, that venue was booked, so the event was held in a hotel without an airport shuttle, necessitating the need to provide for travel between the airport and hotel. This was a notable expense given the number of attendees and the cost of a round trip cab ride between the airport and venue.

Due to the aforementioned overages in travel-related costs, YR DFA supplemented the project with other grant dollars from related grants from USFWS and the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, & Economic Development.



CONCLUSIONS

In designing and implementing this project, YR DFA worked to be as inclusive as time and resources would allow, to give stakeholders throughout the drainage the opportunity to have their voices heard. Participation was quite good, showing that stakeholders are still keenly interested in actively participating in the management of their salmon, and agencies are keen on working with stakeholders to better manage the salmon resource. More participation directly resulted in a more successful endeavor, as more stakeholders were able to learn and provide the input that shaped salmon management plans.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for the Yukon River Summer Season Preparedness Process was provided by the Yukon River Panel and USFWS. In addition to our funders, YRDFA would like to offer special thanks to everyone who provided advice and/or participation in this process. A strong presence from all stakeholders—fishers, managers, processors, Tribal representatives, Inter-Tribal organizations, advisory councils, and others—maximizes the effectiveness and utility of such efforts.

Appendix A: Invitation Packet



YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

725 Christensen Drive, Suite 3-B, Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Tel: 907-272-3141 Toll free: 877-999-8566

Fax: 907-272-3142 Web: www.yukonsalmon.org

February 29, 2012

Dear Tribal Council Representative:

It is again time to begin planning for the return of the Chinook salmon to the Yukon River. Unfortunately, once again, the outlook is not encouraging—the run is expected to be below average to poor.

Much like last year, there will be a riverwide fisheries meeting in Anchorage on April 4 to bring together Tribal representatives, fisheries managers, and other stakeholders to talk about how the salmon run should be managed. I'm sending this packet to you in advance of the meeting in the hopes that the your Tribal Council will have time to talk about the main topics that will be covered, so that the person you choose to represent you can be sure to express the views of your Tribe.

I have enclosed the following informational items:

1. An invitation to the meeting and postage paid reply card.
2. A list of questions for your Tribal Council to consider in advance of the meeting.
3. Background information to provide more detail for the list of questions—Potential Changes to the Yukon River King Salmon Management Plan.
4. A flyer from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about Chinook salmon run strength and the need to rebuild the stocks.

If the Chinook salmon run is again poor, as the preliminary outlook suggests, additional management measures will be necessary going into the summer season to ensure we get enough fish to the spawning grounds to sustain the run into the future. Fishers and fisheries managers share the responsibility for the survival of the salmon. While we know it is hard on people to consider taking less fish than they need, for the run to continue we may need to begin planning on alternative resources to sustain people in your community.

Please review the enclosed information and questions at your upcoming Tribal Council meeting. You can use the enclosed reply card, or call us at 1-877-999-8566 extension 101 or 907-746-7355, to let us know who you will be sending to the meeting. As in the past, we will cover the expenses related to your representative's travel, meals, and lodging, and we will be in touch to arrange those details.

Sincerely,
Jill Klein
Executive Director



You are invited to the
2012 Yukon River Pre-Season
Fisheries Planning Meeting
in Anchorage on April 4, 2012.

Please select a representative
from your Tribe to attend.

All travel expenses will be covered.
RSVP using the enclosed
postage paid envelope.
Additional details will be available
later in March.

We hope you are able to join
representatives from other Tribes,
industry managers, and other
stakeholders in working to create
a fair management plan
for
rebuilding the Chinook salmon run
on the Yukon River.

Questions?
Call Jason Fiske with the
Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association
at 907-746-7255.

Please reply by March 17, 2012

We _____ Tribal Council
_____ Will attend
_____ Will not attend

Please indicate your representative's name and
phone number

Name

Phone

Instructions

Please work with your Tribal Council to complete the following survey questions. The first page focuses on management of this summer's salmon run. The remaining pages focus on a stakeholder-driven revision of the King Salmon Management Plan.

Fax completed surveys to the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) at 907-272-3142 by April 1, 2012. Also, have a representative of your Tribal Council bring a copy of the completed survey to the planning meeting in Anchorage on April 4, 2012.

Questions? Call Jason Hale with YRDFA at 907-746-7355.

**2012 Pre-Season Management Plan
Questions from State & Federal Fisheries Managers**

Please have your Tribal Council answer the following questions related to Yukon River salmon management in the summer of 2012.

Incidental sales of Chinook (king) salmon from summer chum commercial fisheries

Can sales be allowed if conservation measures such as pulse closures are in place to protect king salmon as they move up to the spawning grounds?

Yes No

Concurrent subsistence and commercial fishing during times of conservation or for directed summer chum salmon fishing

To allow for summer chum commercial fishing while minimizing any increased impact on king salmon, can subsistence fishing periods and commercial summer chum openers occur at the same time?

Yes No

Harvest Reductions

If the project is low for the number of king salmon returning to the Yukon River, can members of your Tribe and/or community voluntarily reduce their normal harvest of kings?

Yes No

What steps can members of your Tribe and/or community take to be able to take fewer kings in years of shortage?

Gear

Should we use 6 inch gear the entire season to protect king salmon and allow more harvest of summer chum salmon?

Yes No

**Yukon River King Salmon Management Plan Revision
Tribal Council Input Survey**

Please indicate whether your Tribal Council supports or opposes the following possible draft components for the Yukon River King Salmon Management Plan, developed by fisheries stakeholders from the Yukon River.

For background information and detailed explanations of the rationale behind each of these questions, reference the enclosed document: Potential Changes to the Yukon River King Salmon Management Plan.

Pulse Protection

First Pulse

1. Not allow any harvest from the first pulse, regardless of the preseason run size projection.
 Support Oppose

2. Allow a harvest not to exceed 50% of the passage of the first pulse, regardless of the preseason run size projection.
 Support Oppose

3. Not allow any harvest from the first pulse when the preseason projection of run size indicates that subsistence harvests will likely be restricted in one or more districts or sub-districts.
 Support Oppose

4. Do not formalize pulse protection.
 Support Oppose

Second & Third Pulses

Based on the inseason run assessment, the department will restrict harvest opportunities on the second and third pulses of Yukon River king salmon, as necessary, to provide for escapements and international treaty obligations.

- Support Oppose

Equity

The department shall distribute reductions in subsistence harvest opportunities equitably among users.

- Support Oppose

**Yukon River King Salmon Management Plan Revision
Additional Items for Consideration**

1. Protection for early fish

Establish greater protection for the earliest returning king salmon (prior to windows schedule or pulse protection).

Support Oppose

2. Sale of incidentally caught kings by set date or percentage of king run has gone by

Allow the sale of incidentally caught king salmon after a set date or after a specified proportion of the king salmon run has passed Pilot Station Sonar.

Support Oppose

3. Subsistence and personal use harvest reporting

Require improved harvest reporting, perhaps through harvest report forms issued by the department.

Support Oppose

4. Subsistence use permit

Households must obtain a subsistence permit to participate in subsistence fishing.

Support Oppose

5. Concurrent subsistence and commercial periods

Delete (5 AAC 01.210(e)(1)A) requiring a waiting period between subsistence and commercial periods in Districts 1, 2, and 3.

Support Oppose

6. Prohibition on selling king salmon roe in Sub-district 4-A

Expand the prohibition on selling king salmon roe in Sub-district 4-A to the entire drainage. Change the regulation (5 AAC 05.360(c)) to read: A harvester may not sell king salmon roe; only whole king salmon may be sold.

Support Oppose

7. Mesh depth of net

Reduce the allowable mesh depth.

Support Oppose

8. Windows

If pulse protection is adopted for management of king salmon in the Yukon River, consider how the subsistence fishing periods (“windows”) should be applied during times of conservation.

1. Keep windows

Support Oppose

2. If pulse protection is adopted, eliminate windows

Support Oppose

3. If the first pulse is protected, eliminate windows after the first pulse

Support Oppose

**Potential Changes to the
Yukon River King Salmon Management Plan**
Proposed by Yukon River stakeholder group
February 22, 2012

Overview

The Yukon River king salmon stock historically provided for adequate escapement and subsistence, commercial, personal use, and recreational harvests. However, in recent years the number of king salmon returning to the Yukon River has declined, such that even subsistence harvests have been restricted to provide for basic escapement needs. In response to stakeholder concerns, and in preparation for the 2012-2013 Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) proposal cycle which will include Yukon River salmon proposals, the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) initiated a process to review existing management strategies and achieve consensus among stakeholders on potential measures to improve king salmon management in the Yukon River. Funding for these efforts was provided by the State of Alaska. The overall goal of this process is to use stakeholder input to identify measures to facilitate rebuilding of the Yukon River king salmon stock.

To develop proposals with riverwide consensus, YRDFA convened stakeholder representatives from the lower, middle, and upper Yukon and including three Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils, the Yukon River Panel, the Association of Village Council Presidents, the Tanana Chiefs Conference, the Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments, YRDFA, the Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association (CDQ group), an upper river processor, and management and research staff from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The stakeholder group met in Anchorage January 11-12, 2012 to discuss potential approaches; pulse protection of Yukon River king salmon was identified as a primary focus. The following text outlines the proposal with options identified where the group did not have consensus. After receiving comments from the broader Yukon River community, the stakeholder group will revise this proposal for submission to the BOF for the 2012/13 proposal cycle; BOF proposals must be submitted by April 10, 2012. The BOF meets in Anchorage January 15-20, 2013 to consider Yukon (as well as Arctic and Kuskowkim) proposals. **The stakeholder group is currently requesting your comments on this draft proposal.** The final proposal will be circulated prior to the Board of Fisheries meeting and there will also be an opportunity to comment directly to the Board of Fisheries.

Background and Context for the Proposal

Yukon River king salmon have experienced extreme fluctuations in run size, including very low run sizes during 1998–2002. From 2003 to 2006, runs improved and escapement goals and subsistence needs were generally met. Runs again declined after 2006, with escapement goals to Canada not met in 2007, 2008, or 2010, and subsistence harvests restricted. Overall, “mean run of Canadian-origin Chinook for the period 1998-2010 declined 45% compared to the period 1982-1997.”¹ In response to this decline, during their last four Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) meetings the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) adopted regulations intended to improve quantity and quality of king salmon escapements. Two key regulations are the “windows” fishing schedule, used for greater conservation, and restriction of gillnet mesh size to a maximum of 7.5 inches. Windows limit subsistence to specific fishing periods, spreading the harvest across the salmon run, while the mesh size restriction is designed to increase spawning escapement of larger king salmon.

¹ Spaeder, J. and M. Catalano, Compilation of Evidence for Long-term Decline and Periodic Low Returns of AYK Region Chinook Populations, Report to Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative Chinook Expert Panel, Oct. 15, 2011.

While king salmon escapement goals have been met in most years since 1998, fishing opportunities were often restricted to help meet these goals. Subsistence harvest opportunities were reduced in recent years, and in 2008, 2009, and 2010 (2011 data not yet available) harvests were below the BOF-determined Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS). To protect king salmon, directed commercial fishing for king salmon was eliminated, commercial chum salmon fishing was restricted, and sale of king salmon caught in the chum salmon fishery was at times prohibited. Even when escapement goals have been met, subsequent returns from these escapements have been poor. While the direct cause is unknown, poor runs have low recruits-per-spawner (the ratio of number of fish returning to the river compared to their parental spawners). It is important to maintain the quantity and quality of escapements to aid in returning the stock to historical levels.

King Salmon Pulse Protection Proposal

(underlined text represents additions to the current language)

5 AAC 05.360 (a) The objective of this plan is to provide the department with guidelines to manage for the sustained yield of Yukon River king salmon. The goal of this plan is to ensure that adequate escapements, both in numbers and quality, are maintained on the spawning grounds to facilitate rebuilding of the run to historical levels. The department will manage for quality of escapement that provides for full representation of the genetic and phenotypic characteristics of the stock and shall use the best available data, including preseason run projections, test fishing indices, age and sex composition, subsistence and commercial harvest reports, and passage estimates from escapement monitoring projects to assess the run size for the purpose of implementing this plan.

5 AAC 05.360 (XX). Pulse protection.

- (1) The Yukon River king salmon run usually enters the river in three distinctive pulses of fish. Management of the first pulse of the king salmon run will be based on preseason projections. Management of the second and third pulses will be based on in-season run assessment data.
- (2) The department will manage the first pulse of the king salmon run based on preseason run projections to:
Options:
 - (a) Not allow any harvest from the first pulse, regardless of the preseason run size projection;
 - (b) Allow a harvest not to exceed 50% of the passage of the first pulse, regardless of the preseason run size projection;
 - (c) Not allow any harvest from the first pulse when the preseason projection of run size indicates that subsistence harvests will likely be restricted in one or more districts or sub-districts.
- (3) Based on the inseason run assessment, the department will restrict harvest opportunities on the second and third pulses of Yukon River king salmon, as necessary, to provide for escapements and international treaty obligations;
- (4) The department shall distribute reductions in subsistence harvest opportunities equitably among users.

Rationale

The intent of the proposed changes is to rebuild the Yukon River king stock to historical levels. This stock remains depressed well below historic levels, and older salmon are lacking from recent returns. Although the sustainable salmon policy addresses stock diversity and quality of escapement, much of the Yukon management emphasis has been on spawner abundance. The cause of low returns-per-

spawner is unknown. It is prudent to ensure that adequate numbers of male, female, and large fish reach the spawning grounds to contribute to stock rebuilding.

The first pulse of king salmon entering the Yukon River usually contains the largest number of fish and the most Canadian-origin fish. First pulse fish also tend to be larger fish. Under a treaty between the U.S. and Canada, the U.S. must allow passage of enough Canadian-origin king salmon to meet an agreed-upon escapement goal plus additional Canadian-origin fish for harvest sharing. The treaty obligation is a primary factor for Alaskan management. Because Canadian-origin fish usually comprise about half of total king salmon returns to the Yukon River, ensuring the health of this stock is important not only for treaty terms, but to ensure continued returns of Canadian-origin fish for Alaskan harvest. Thus, in low return years, the department must restrict all Alaskan fisheries in the Yukon River to achieve border passage of Canadian fish.

Pulse protection has been used successfully for king salmon management. For example, after Canadian escapement goals were not met in 2007, 2008, and 2010, and given a 2011 return of Canadian-origin fish projected to be insufficient to support full subsistence harvests in Alaska, managers protected the first pulse of king salmon by reducing or eliminating subsistence fishing opportunity as this pulse moved through Alaska; border passage obligations were met. Further restrictions on subsequent pulses, which contained a majority of Alaskan-origin fish, resulted in Alaskan escapement generally being met. Thus, pulse protection allowed king salmon escapements goals to be met in most Yukon River tributaries and treaty obligations to be fulfilled. A secondary result was that escapement quality, measured as percent large fish and percent female, was enhanced throughout the drainage, although 2011 was the first year of the 7.5 inch maximum mesh size restriction, so improved escapement quality could be due to the mesh size change, pulse protection, or both.

In past years, conservation measures were often implemented more aggressively later in the run when return strength was better estimated. Establishing formal language that provides management advice to specifically protect the early portion of the king salmon run will: (1) improve border passage of Canadian-origin fish; (2) allow better assessment of run strength prior to harvesting; (3) enhance escapement of larger, older fish present early in the run;² and 4) reduce uncertainty regarding potential early-season fishery openings.

² Note that the reduction in mesh size is also intended to improve escapement quality.

Additional Items for Consideration

*These items were identified as those which at least some of the stakeholder group had interest in, but did not have time to develop further **The stakeholder group did NOT have consensus on these items.** Please provide your comments on these items as well.*

9. Protection for early fish

Proposal

Establish greater protection for the earliest returning king salmon (prior to windows schedule or pulse protection).

Rationale

Subsistence fishing is open 7 days per week from breakup until the schedule of subsistence fishing periods is implemented. The start of subsistence fishing periods is established by department emergency order and typically begins in late May or early June in District 1 (initiated June 6 in 2011). The schedule is then implemented chronologically upriver, although the established schedule does not result in early season fishing closures in all sub-districts/rivers. An early group of king salmon typically enters the river in early June with the first pulse entering the river around June 15. In 2011, lower river breakup occurred on May 22, an average date, and the first lower river catch of king salmon was reported on June 3 in both the lower river test fishery and in the subsistence catch. However, the time between breakup and the implementation of subsistence fishing periods is popular for the subsistence harvest of sheefish, as well as these early king salmon. It is possible that the implementation of pulse protection, particularly for the first pulse of king salmon returning to the Yukon, will result in intensified efforts to harvest the early king salmon present prior to the date that the pulse protection is implemented. Although the early group includes a relatively small number of king salmon, the importance of these fish to the overall genetic diversity in the population is unknown. Establishing an early season closure prior to the start of the subsistence fishing schedule, or starting the subsistence fishing schedule slightly earlier, may protect this genetic diversity. However, the department currently has authority to adjust the subsistence schedule start date contingent on factors such as projected return abundance and any corresponding stock concerns, or changes in fishing patterns.

10. Sale of incidentally caught kings by set date or percentage of king run has gone by

Proposal

Allow the sale of incidentally caught king salmon after a set date or after a specified proportion of the king salmon run has passed Pilot Station Sonar.

Rationale

Some kings are incidentally caught in the commercial summer chum fishery. This fishery is restricted to a maximum mesh size of 6 inches. Approximately 70-80% of the king salmon caught in the summer chum fishery are small males. Removal of these fish from the run has an unknown impact on the reproductive potential of the stocks. During times of conservation, management actions may allow these king salmon to be retained for subsistence, but not sold. Based on a predetermined date or index of run progress or after a pulse protection measure has occurred, allowing the sale of incidentally caught fish may provide a limited commercial sale of salmon and may reduce waste of king salmon caught incidentally if subsistence needs have been met. On the other hand, allowing the sale of incidentally caught kings may provide harvesters with an incentive to catch kings at a time when conservation is needed. Some harvesters also support removal of these small males from the genetic population in an effort to increase mean size of Yukon River king salmon.

11. Subsistence and personal use harvest reporting

Proposal

Require improved harvest reporting, perhaps through harvest report forms issued by the department.

Rationale

Data for subsistence and personal use harvests are currently based on a combination of annual or seasonal permits and household interviews. Much of the data collection involves post-season sampling. Requiring all subsistence and personal use harvesters to maintain updated harvest reports will facilitate improved in-season monitoring and accuracy of post-season harvest summaries. Development of this proposal will require further consideration of costs of harvest reporting and enforcement for noncompliance

12. Subsistence use permit

Proposal

Households must obtain a subsistence permit to participate in subsistence fishing.

Rationale

Data for subsistence harvests are currently based on a combination of annual or seasonal permits and household interviews. Although a subsistence permit is required for some harvest areas (e.g., road accessible sections and the Tanana River), other areas, are outside of the subsistence permit requirement area. Expanding this permit requirement to other selected areas of the Yukon would potentially improve: management's anticipation of potential effort; understanding of subsistence user demographics (through information requested when issuing the permit); and harvest reporting (through reporting requirements as a condition of the permit being issued). However, it is also recognized that requiring subsistence permits increases the obligations of harvesters and the expense to the department for permit implementation; some stakeholders are also concerned about how the permit information would be used.

13. Concurrent subsistence and commercial periods

Proposal

Delete (5 AAC 01.210(e)(1)A) requiring a waiting period between subsistence and commercial periods in Districts 1, 2, and 3.

Rationale

Harvest periods ("windows") are intended to distribute harvests across the run, and regulation 05 AAC 01.210(e)(1)A affects the early summer when Yukon king salmon return. Commercial and subsistence fishing may open concurrently in the upper Yukon, but lower Yukon regulations require a "waiting period" between commercial and subsistence openings to facilitate enforcement and allow assessment of run strength. However, waiting period regulations were adopted prior to the establishment of harvest windows. Given the in-season management option to close specific windows of time to protect run components, waiting periods between fishery openings are unnecessary and may constrain fishing opportunity given the limited amount of time available between op periods in some areas. It is noted that allowing concurrent fishing by commercial and subsistence harvesters may increase competition between these users. In addition, because commercial and subsistence harvesters are often the same individuals using the same gear, allowing concurrent openings forces some individuals to select either commercial or subsistence fishing while foregoing the alternative fishing opportunity. Allowing only sequential openings without a waiting period allows an individual to participate in both harvest opportunities.

14. Prohibition on selling king salmon roe in Sub-district 4-A

Proposal

Expand the prohibition on selling king salmon roe in Sub-district 4-A to the entire drainage. Change the regulation (5 AAC 05.360(c)) to read: A harvester may not sell king salmon roe; only whole king salmon may be sold.

Rationale

The existing regulation was adopted in 1998 to address roe stripping from king salmon in Yukon River Sub-district 4-A, but the regulation generates confusion relative to what is allowed in other sub-districts and why Sub-district 4-A is singled out. By specifically addressing Sub-district 4-A, the regulatory language of the Yukon Chinook Management Plan implies that roe stripping from king salmon may be allowed in other sub-districts. The regulation could be expanded to provide consistency among Yukon sub-districts. There is no directed commercial harvest of Yukon River king salmon in Alaska under present stock conditions. However, when the stock rebuilds to a level providing for commercial harvest, the whole king salmon should be utilized for human consumption.

15. Mesh depth of net

Proposal

Reduce the allowable mesh depth.

Rationale

The current maximum mesh depth for commercial fishing with gillnets on the Yukon River varies by district and gillnet mesh size. For Districts 1-3, nets may be up to 45 meshes deep for larger than 6-inch mesh and up to 50 meshes deep for a mesh size of 6 inches or smaller. For Districts 4-6, nets may be up to 60 meshes deep for larger than 6-inch mesh and up to 70 meshes deep for a mesh size of 6 inches or smaller. Some stakeholders report that king salmon migrating upstream occur deeper in the water column than chum salmon, and some people report the largest king salmon occur deepest. Reducing the allowable mesh depth could reduce the efficiency of catching for king salmon, and potentially of large king salmon, thereby increasing escapement of those fish or sizes. Some stakeholders have suggested establishing a consistent 45-mesh depth with the 7.5 inch mesh for all Yukon River districts. However, it is noted under equal aspects of escapement goals and passage rates, a reduction in efficiency implies that more fishing time will be needed in order to achieve the same ANS. This reduced efficiency would be most pronounced upriver where a greater mesh depth is currently allowed.

16. Windows

Proposal

If pulse protection is adopted for management of king salmon in the Yukon River, consider how the subsistence fishing periods (“windows”) should be applied during times of conservation.

Options

1. Keep windows
2. If pulse protection is adopted, eliminate windows
3. If the first pulse is protected, eliminate windows after the first pulse

Rationale

During times of conservation, subsistence fishing is only allowed during district or subdistrict specific periods, commonly known as subsistence fishing “windows.” Windows are designed to spread the

subsistence harvest over the king salmon run. Distributing fishery catch across the run during years of poor returns facilitates more precise in-season management through more timely assessment of run strength and passage. The use of windows improves the likelihood of achieving escapement goals, and also distributes escapement from a poor return across the duration of the run, thereby assuring representation of the genetic diversity inherent across the run.

The Yukon River king salmon run usually enters the river in three distinctive pulses of fish. The first pulse of king salmon returning to the Yukon River usually contains the largest number of fish, as well as the most Canadian-origin fish. An international treaty stipulates that the U.S. will endeavor to provide to Canada an agreed-upon escapement goal, in number of king salmon, plus a pre-specified harvest share of the surplus Canadian-origin fish above the escapement goal. The use of pulse protection, if adopted, improves the likelihood of achieving escapement goals and international treaty. Because protection of a pulse of fish precludes harvest opportunity from that pulse, reasonable subsistence harvest opportunity must be provided from subsequent pulses. Meeting ANS following a pulse closure would be easier in the absence of windows. However, if there is still jeopardy of not achieving escapement goals (i.e., a conservation concern) after a pulse closure, then windows provide an effective management tool to distribute the harvest across the available fish surplus to escapement needs.



2012 Yukon River Chinook Salmon Update



Yukon River Chinook salmon are important to all users in the Yukon Area. Unfortunately, these stocks have experienced a decline in production. Current run sizes are about half of historic levels, making it difficult to meet escapement goals and provide for subsistence uses on the river. Harvests and total run size have been greatly reduced since 2000 (Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively). Chinook salmon runs have been below expectations and escapement goals into Canada were not met in three of the last five years (Figure 3). Preliminary analyses suggest the 2012 Yukon River Chinook salmon run will again be below average to poor and the run will not be sufficient to fully support subsistence needs.

It is now prudent to enter the 2012 season with the expectation that conservation measures will be required in an effort to meet escapement goals and share the available subsistence harvest.

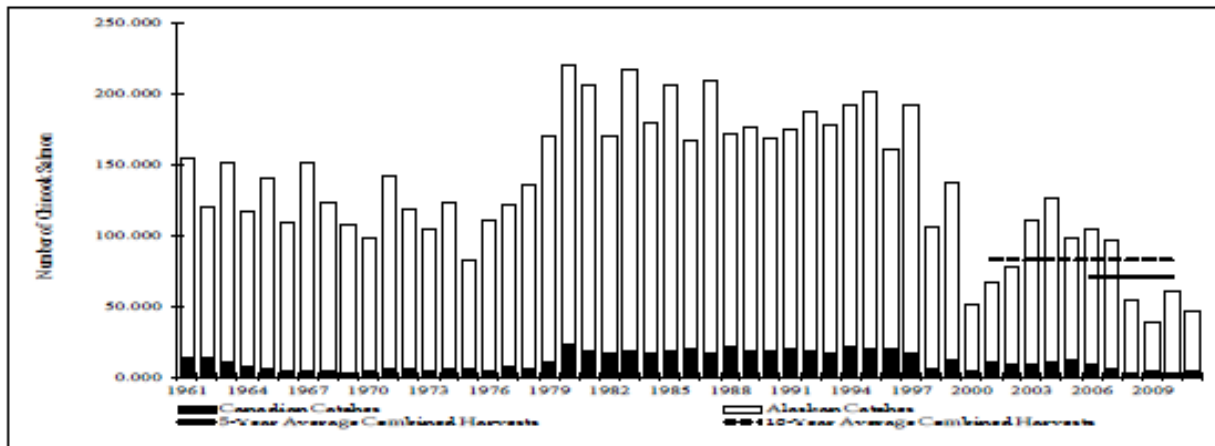


Figure 1. Total combined harvest of Chinook salmon, Yukon River, 1961-2011. Data from 2011 are preliminary.

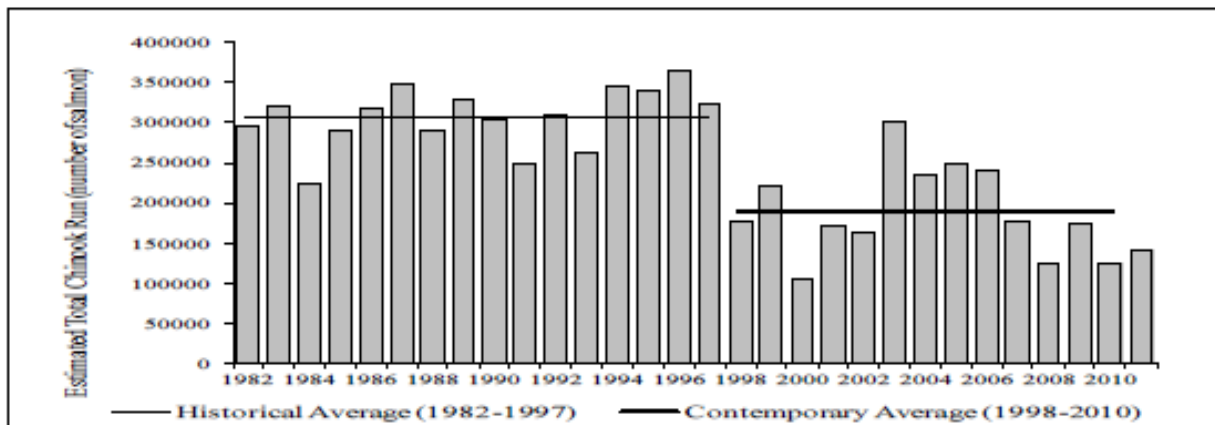


Figure 2. The estimated total Yukon River Chinook salmon run size, 1982-2011. Data from 2011 are preliminary.



2012 Yukon River Chinook Salmon Update

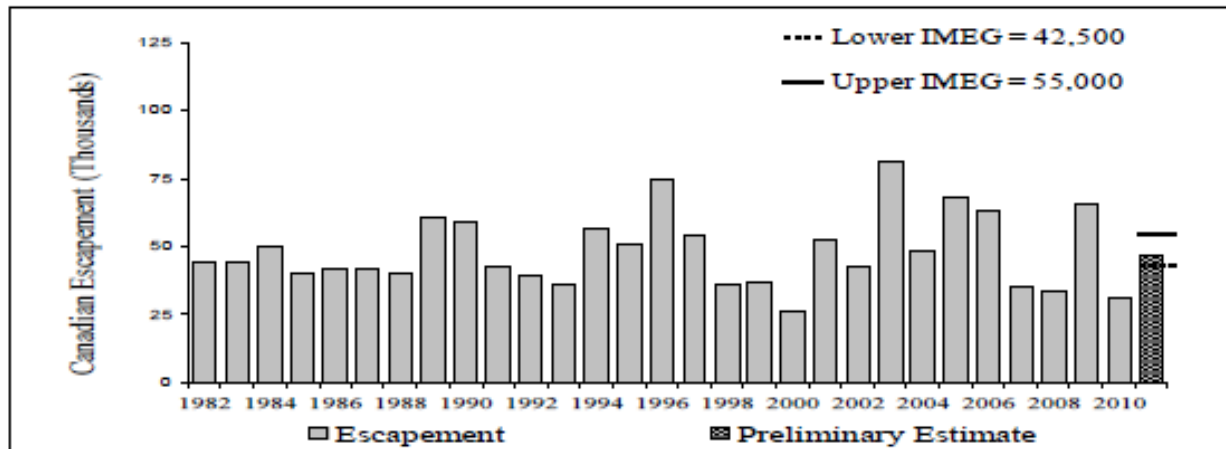


Figure 3. The estimated number of Chinook salmon reaching spawning grounds in the Canadian portion of the mainstem Yukon River drainage, 1982-2011. Data from 2011 are preliminary. The dotted and dashed lines represent the 2011 interim escapement goal range (IMEG).

Over half of the Yukon River Chinook salmon that are harvested in Alaska are Canadian-origin. Therefore, it is very important to keep Canadian as well as Alaskan stocks healthy. Conservation of fisheries resources by all users is extremely important for ensuring future salmon runs. It is necessary for all users to help in meeting escapement goals. In recent years, Canadian fishermen have voluntarily reduced their subsistence harvest, sometimes by more than 50%, in order to allow fish to reach the spawning grounds. During these low runs, it is necessary for all users to look at the amount they harvest and determine how they can voluntarily reduce their harvest to help ensure adequate Chinook salmon escapement.

Given the users' concerns about the future of Yukon River Chinook salmon runs, it is necessary to continue efforts in developing a management plan focused on rebuilding the stocks. The initial objectives of the plan are to achieve escapement goals in the Alaska portion of the drainage and meet escapement and harvest sharing commitments to Canada. Furthermore, this plan must provide for subsistence use of Chinook salmon in the Alaska portion of the drainage and management of overlapping summer chum salmon fisheries.

Yukon River fisheries managers need your continued support in carrying out management strategies and options for 2012 that will help in getting fish to the spawning grounds should the Chinook salmon run be similar to the poor runs of 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2011 (Figure 2). The 2011 season is a good example of Yukon River people cooperating to attain the necessary salmon on the spawning grounds even though the Chinook salmon run was poor. Because of the trend of low productivity, it is anticipated that a conservative management plan will be in place for the next few years.

During the winter and spring, State and Federal fisheries managers will attend several meetings to inform fishermen and user groups of the 2012 outlook, and to receive input on management options for the 2012 fishing season. Yukon River fisheries managers are soliciting practical ideas for reducing Chinook salmon harvests from resource users on the river. All people who depend on Yukon River salmon have a role in protecting these special fish for future generations.

For additional information:
 ADF&G: Steve Hayes in Anchorage 907-267-2383
 USFWS: Fred Bue in Fairbanks 907-455-1849

Appendix B: Agenda

2012 Yukon River Fisheries Pre-Season Planning Meeting

Hotel Captain Cook, Anchorage

April 4, 2012

- 8:30 a.m. Opening prayer
Introductions, purpose, & opening comments
- 9:15 a.m. **Background**
2012 run outlook & initial thoughts on management – *ADF&G & USFWS*
- 9:55 a.m. Open discussion, questions, and public comment – *moderated by YRDFA*
- 10:30 a.m. BREAK
- 10:45 a.m. **Group Discussions – Steve Hayes, ADF&G, Fred Bue, USFWS, and Jason Hale, YRDFA**
Presentation of Topic #1: Restrict to Federally qualified subsistence users
Discussion at tables on Topic #1: Restrict to Federally qualified subsistence users
Report from tables on Topic #1: Restrict to Federally qualified subsistence users
- 11:30 a.m. Presentation of Topic #2: Voluntary reductions
Discussion at tables on Topic #2: Voluntary reductions
Report from tables on Topic #2: Voluntary reductions
- 12:15 p.m. LUNCH / optional working lunch (provided)
- 1:15 p.m. Presentation of Topic #3: Sale of incidentally caught king salmon
Discussion at tables on Topic #3: Sale of incidentally caught king salmon
Report from tables on Topic #3: Sale of incidentally caught king salmon
- 2:00 p.m. BREAK
- 2:15 p.m. **Education Sessions (45 minutes each)**
Break-out educational sessions #1
- Salmon science – *Dr. Stephanie Schmidt & Heather Leba, ADF&G*
 - Fall chum – *Jeff Estensen ADF&G*
- 3:10 p.m. Break-out educational sessions #2
- Harvests and subsistence law – *Caroline Brown, ADF&G*
 - Commercial processor panel – *Jack Schultheis, Virgil Umphenour, Doug Karlberg*
- 4:00 p.m. **Presentation of King Salmon Management Plan Revision & related survey**
- 4:45 p.m. **Meeting Wrap-Up**
Presentation of preseason plan – *Steve Hayes, ADF&G and Fred Bue, USFWS*
Closing remarks
- 5:30 p.m. Adjourn

Appendix C: Handouts Describing Management Options

Topic #1: Federally Qualified Subsistence Users

Based on the king salmon run outlook, subsistence fishing activity will be affected this season. Do you support restricting king salmon fishing in federal waters to federally qualified subsistence users this summer to reduce fishing pressure from people living outside the Yukon River drainage or in urban areas, thereby providing a priority for those living closer to the resource?

Yes	No

If “Yes”, when or at what level should this action be taken?

A. For the entire king season	
B. When managers determine that it is necessary to reduce subsistence king salmon harvest by more than one half drainage-wide	
C. Other	

Topic #2: Voluntary Reductions

- A. Assuming the run projection is correct, subsistence fishers will not be able to harvest as many king salmon as they normally do and still meet the spawning escapement goals necessary for the future of the run.**

Are there steps you and others in your community take to make up for that reduced harvest, before, during, or after the king salmon fishing season?

Yes	No

If “Yes”, what are those steps?

- B. Understanding the need to get king salmon up to the spawning grounds, are you willing to intentionally take fewer king salmon than normal if returns are as poor as projected?**

Yes	No

Topic #3: Sale of Incidentally Caught King Salmon

When should sale of king salmon incidentally caught in a commercial chum fishery be allowed?

Never	Early July, after most of the run has passed the Lower River	Other

Appendix D: Detailed Meeting Minutes/Summary

2012 YUKON RIVER PRE-SEASON PLANNING & COMMUNICATIONS MEETING

Captain Cook Hotel

Anchorage, Alaska

April 4, 2012

8:30 a.m.

YRFDA Meeting. 4/4/12 Captain Cook Hotel

Attendees:

John Linderman, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Sue Aspelund, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Dan Bergstrom, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Rocky James, Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in Tribal Government
Dayna Green, Department of Fish and Game
John Radasheuna
Norbert Beans, Algaaciq Tribal Government
Gerald Maschmann, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Rondell Jimmy, Nenana Native Council
Elias Kelly, Pilot Station Traditional Council
Fred Huntington, Louden Tribal Council
Philip Titus, Minto Village Council
Victor Lord, YRDLA Upper River
Audra Brase, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Paul Shewfelt, Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in Tribal Government
Andy Bassich, Eagle
Virgil Umphenour, Interior Fish
Roberta Murphy, Chuloonawick Native Village
Heather Leba, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Casie Stockdale, AVCP
Jeremy Mears, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Peter Demoski, Nulato Tribal Council
Alfred Demientieff, Holy Cross Traditional Council
Eluska John, Shageluk IRA Council
Vincent Simon, Allakaket Traditional Council
Darrell Vent, Sr., Huslia Tribal Council
Orville Huntington, Tanana Chiefs Council
Percy Lolnitz, Koyukuk Tribal Council
Craig Semaken, Kaltag Tribal Council
Caroline Brown, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Alida Trainor, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Colleen Stickman, Nulato Tribal Council
Angela Demientieff, Holy Cross
Nathan Elswick, Anvik Tribal Council
Robert Walker Anvik, YRAC
Michael Jimmy, Emmonak Tribal Council

Dominica Strongheart, Native Village of Nunam Iqua
Clifford Kaganak, Scammon Bay Traditional Council
Maurice Turet, Ohogamiut Traditional Council
Jan Conitz, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Amanda Wiese, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Emmanuel Keyes, Kotlik Traditional Council
Aaron Housler, Iqurmiut Tribal Council
Arlene Pitka, Beaver Village Council
Doug Karlberg, Kaltag Commercial Fishery
Eric Newland, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Jeff Estensen, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Stanley Ned, Allakaket
Gene Sandone, Kwikpak Fisheries
John Burr, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
James Martin, Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government
Macarthur Tritt, Venetie Village Council
Raymond Woods, Manley Village Council
Curt Aaron Zimenekoff, Tanana
Polly Wheeler, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Jim Neely, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Jim Houser, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
April Nelson
Don Rivard, Office of Subsistence Management
Steve Hayes, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Fred Bue, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Stephanie Schmidt, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Call to Order:

Mr. Jason Hale called the meeting to order.

Opening Prayer:

The opening prayer was given by Mr. Percy Lolnitz.

Introductions:

Those present introduced themselves.

Purpose of Meeting:

Mr. Hale discussed that the purpose of the meeting was to figure out how to manage salmon this year as well as in the future. There will be discussion on making the king salmon management plan a river-wide plan. This is the fourth meeting and the big issues have been decided on, this meeting will focus on details. The participants are requested to share what they hear at this meeting with their communities. Mr. Hale stated the Yukon River Panel has funded this meeting and requested Mr. Bassich to discuss who the Yukon River Panel is and what they're doing with the fishery.

Mr. Andy Bassich stated that the Yukon River Panel was formed in 2001 when the Canadian Treaty was signed. The Yukon River Panel is in charge of funding research projects for the Yukon River in Canada and Alaska. The panel meets twice a year to set escapement goals and identify areas for research and funding. The objective of the panel is to ensure fish for all on the Yukon River in Canada and Alaska. Information will be provided to any person interested in becoming a member of the Yukon River Panel.

Mr. Hale discussed the ground rules for the meeting which include no hitting, no interrupting, don't monopolize the discussion, show respect, stay on topic and minimize repetition.

The next item on the agenda is the 2012 run outlook and initial thoughts on management.

Dr. Schmidt thanked the participants for their attention. She stated the estimated numbers for the 2012 drainage-wide chinook run are 109,000 to 146,000 which is a poor to below average run. She discussed the numbers of fish returning to the Yukon River today as compared to historical runs and stated there is an approximate 50 percent reduction in average run size. Management priorities in order of importance are meeting escapement goals, subsistence use in Canada and Alaska, commercial, sport and recreational fishing.

Dr. Schmidt discussed the total run size and the approximate number of Canada bound salmon harvested in Alaska and the possibility of run restrictions similar to 2009 and 2011.

Dr. Schmidt stated the estimated summer chum run outlook is average with a run size of 1.5 to 2 million. Subsistence and escapement needs are expected to be met with a possible commercial harvest depending on run size and timing.

Mr. Bue discussed the need to protect salmon and users of salmon on the Yukon River and the historical 50 percent reduction in run size and the need to figure out how to effectively reduce harvest and minimize hardship on users. Windows is a means of ensuring all fish are not taken from a single run. Pulse protection will conserve extra fish and ensure that some fish will get to the spawning grounds and provides an opportunity for assessing the runs as they develop. Windows will be initiated at the beginning of the king salmon run.

Mr. Hayes discussed the need for cooperation from fishermen to meet escapement goals and spread the harvest for subsistence.

Mr. Hale discussed the procedure for the comment period.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD:

Mr. Timothy Andrew stated that one important element missing from Dr. Schmidt's presentation was the amounts necessary for subsistence and what the subsistence harvest would look like in between the expected range of 109,000 to 146,000 returning chinook.

Dr. Schmidt stated the total chinook subsistence harvest numbers for 2011 to 2009 and the baseline of data are the Canadian origin chinook.

Ms. Caroline Brown stated it would be difficult to get within the ANS range in the best case scenario and the ANS range has not been met in the last couple of years.

Mr. Andrew is concerned about low returns and the affects on subsistence users and states this is the sixth year of not reaching ANS.

Dan Bergstrom stated the focus has mainly been on Canadian stocks, but we have Alaska stocks and escapements that have to be met and protected.

Paul Shewfelt stated that an overview of the management plans that went into effect during 2006 to 2008 should be discussed because this is the year of the return of those years.

Mr. Hayes stated some escapement was met for those years, but production of chinook has dropped possibly due to an ocean or river condition.

Mr. Bue stated that the 2006 escapement goal was met, but 2007 and 2008 did not meet the escapement goals. This group was formed in 2009 to look at why the runs were not responding and to look at management strategies.

Dr. Schmidt presented a graph showing the brood years, how many spawners were getting to the spawning grounds and production from those brood years which shows only one fish is returning for every fish that makes it to the spawning grounds.

Mr. Shewfelt wants to know what management strategies were used.

Mr. Hayes stated the management strategies were not aggressive and there was some commercial fishing at the beginning of the season expecting a certain return of fish, but that management became more conservative throughout the season.

Mr. Fred Huntington asked what year the 122,000 chinook salmon were caught by the pollock fishery as bycatch and what the bycatch was in 2011 and what the cap is for 2012.

Dan Bergstrom stated the 122,000 bycatch was in 2007 and 25,500 in 2011.

Mr. Hale stated the cap went into effect in 2011 and 25,500 was well below the cap. Recent genetic work is indicating more of those fish were Yukon stock than originally thought.

Mr. Virgil Umphenour stated for 2011 based on the new way of sampling in the pollock fishery trawl fleet they would have roughly caught 2,600 to 2,700 fish headed to Tanana River and about 5,500 headed to Canada.

Mr. Huntington asked what the cap was for 2012.

Mr. Hale stated the cap was 60,000 kings per year, but if 47,500 is exceeded in two of any seven years the cap drops to 47,500. The pollock fishery is required to submit incentive plans to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council with the idea being they're trying to work up mechanisms to avoid bycatch of king salmon.

Mr. Darrell Vent is concerned that sustainability of chum salmon will be overestimated with the same result as king salmon.

Mr. Bill Alstrom stated that people on the lower river get first chance at the fish as they enter the river and the first pulse is comprised on both king and chum salmon. Projections of doom are met with

skepticism and that the Department should be listening to the users on the river and that it is important for all users to work together and that people on the lower river only catch what they need.

Mr. Peter Demoski stated that chinook are being overfished and that driftnetting is the deadliest means of fishing there is and that ultimately chinook salmon in the Yukon will be eliminated by the use of driftnets. Windows and pulses and mesh size will not increase chinooks and that only eliminating the use of driftnets will work. Equivalent quotas should be set along the whole Yukon River, you can catch as many fish as you want in Districts 1 and 2 to the detriment of fishermen further up the river.

Mr. Alstrom stated he's not familiar what goes on the upper river, but eliminating driftnetting on the lower river would constitute a hardship as there are no setnet places, no eddies and the river is one to three miles wide.

Mr. Fred Huntington stated that last year his family of three households caught close to 500 king salmon in a one month period and that this does constitute overfishing.

Mr. Norbert Beans stated he was told one fisherman in Nenana caught over 600 kings with a fishwheel and that was less than half of the year before.

Mr. John Riley, Sr. stated that due to erosion the only place you can setnet is the mouth of the St. Mary's River and the only way to fish is to drift.

Mr. Gene Sandone commented that the graph indicates higher production in years of lower escapements and that overfishing is not the cause of poor returns. He also stated that the seven and a half inch mesh size catches more males and that a higher number of females and large fish are crossing into Canada since 2005.

Mr. Beans asked why the Pilot Station sonar is monitored on an eight hour run times three basis and not on a 24 hour basis and if there is science behind the seven and a half inch restriction because it's the larger fish that are crossing into Canada especially in the first pulse.

Mr. Bruce McIntosh stated that over the years Pilot Station sonar has ran 24 hours to test it against the eight hour sample and it's been determined it really doesn't make a difference.

Mr. Beans asked what the survival rate of fish that escape the mesh is and if they make it all the way to Canadian waters.

Mr. John Linderman stated there was a three year long mesh size study conducted in the lower river prior to the Board taking action to put a restriction on total mesh size of seven and a half inches. The study utilized local fishermen who fished the way they normally would using various mesh sizes ranging from five to eight inch plus and there were significant size differences in fish caught with different size mesh. Seven and a half inch mesh did not have a significant increase in the number of other species like summer chum salmon that are overlapping with the chinook salmon and that the seven and a half inch mesh caught smaller chinook salmon than the eight inch plus did.

There has been no study on the Yukon of survival rates for fish escaping mesh, but there have been studies done on other systems and it hasn't shown a large increase in mortality.

Mr. Umphenour stated that a study on catch and release found that fish caught and released at the intertidal area at the mouth of the river have a 80 to 90 percent mortality rate, but fish released away from the intertidal area have less than a 10 percent mortality.

Mr. Sandone stated that that study was done specifically on coho salmon and has nothing to do with any other salmon.

Mr. Hayes added that the mesh size went into effect last year and it's going to take time to study and see what the results are in the future, but the idea was that the seven and a half inch mesh would catch the smaller fish, typically more of the males. Better quality escapement was seen this last year.

Mr. Orville Huntington asked if subsistence fishing was allowed in front of the sonar and if so how long has it been going on and stated it's not a question of how efficient the gear is, it's a question of how much an individual is willing to give up.

Mr. McIntosh stated that the area in front of the sonar station is not closed and they do not know how much is being taken out of there. One reason people fish there is the snags have been removed and they know it's a safe place to drift.

Mr. Steve Hayes stated that subsistence fishing in front of the sonar station could affect the counts and that meetings will be set up with the communities that are affected by fishing in front of the sonar station.

Mr. John Riley stated that last summer the kings showed up all the way from Goose Island all the way down to the mouth, but that no fish showed up at the sonar.

Mr. Hayes stated there was nothing wrong with the sonar last year and the total run was 140,000 kings throughout the entire drainage. Escapement goals into Canada were met and most Alaska goals, but it was half the historic run size and that all fish pass through the lower river.

Mr. Hale stated he remembers a year when fishing was good, everybody met their needs, but the sonar station counted no fish.

Mr. Hayes stated that most people know there is setnet and driftnet test fishery in the lower river as well as the Mountain Village test fishery and that these things are checked against the sonar every day to make sure things are working. These things are not perfect, but do tend to track well.

Mr. Bassich echoed the words of Peter and Mr. Huntington and that is what can we do as individuals to reduce our harvest and that this is the most important thing to be talking about today as opposed to talking about changing fishing techniques. He also stated that his community is the last Alaska community before Canada and that they did see better quality fish and that pulse protection works, it's fair and equitable to everyone on the river.

Mr. Rocky James stated that the needs of future generations should be considered and that people could go without fishing kings for one year with a one year notice period and that 37 percent of the fish caught in Alaska leave the state.

Mr. Percy Lolnitz commented that there are other fish in the river and that people can let the kings go by and it's all part of self governance.

Mr. Nick Andrew, Jr. commented that in past years they had a test fishery at Marshall that basically either contradicted or correlated with the sonar at Pilot Station and added up the numbers from Mountain Village down to Emmonak which gave a better perspective on just how many species and how many fish were actually passing and feels it is imperative that the test fishery at Marshall be restored.

Mr. Hayes stated the Marshall test fishery is now located in Mountain Village which gives an earlier indicator if there's issues going on with the lower river test fishery and Pilot Station. The Department is considering pulling the test fishery early to reduce the amount of kings killed.

Mr. Craig Semaken commented that the last few years there have been a lot of graylings in the river and asked if there's been a study on how many fish the graylings take.

Mr. Bue stated that graylings are a long lived fish so their population doesn't fluctuate as much as salmon do so the fish being seen could be older fish.

Mr. Hale suggested that people at tables with few people should consider taking a seat at another table to facilitate discussion. There are three specific issues for discussion, Federally-qualified users, voluntary reductions and sale of incidentally caught king salmon in the summer chum commercial fisheries.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

TOPIC #1: FEDERALLY-QUALIFIED SUBSISTENCE USERS

Mr. Bue provided background information on this topic. Mr. Bue stated that the Federal program is required to provide a preference for subsistence users living closest to the resource while the State considers all State residents to have equal priority. Federal and State managers work to coordinate management to minimize confusion and avoid conflicting actions.

Based on the 2012 outlook both State and Federal subsistence fishing activities will be restricted. In 2009 the harvest of chinook salmon was restricted in waters adjacent to Federal conservation units to Federally-qualified rural subsistence users only. In 2011 a similar action was not taken, but significant subsistence fishing restrictions were imposed.

Now that conservation efforts have been experienced both with and without the Federally-qualified limitation meeting participants are being asked to discuss if they support restricting subsistence fishing in Federal waters to Federally-qualified subsistence users only and if so when. Non-Federally-qualified users are those living in urban areas or rural areas outside the Yukon River drainage.

The group broke in to table discussions.

Table 2 is in support of Federally-qualified users for this season as a tool that will be unnecessary when the stocks begin to rebuild and that local tribes and villages should be involved in the decision and more local people should be on the Federal Subsistence Board.

Table 3 is in support of Federally-qualified users, but wants the Yukon River tribes involved in the process. There is concern about pallets of king salmon being shipped out of St. Marys and whether anything is being done about it.

Table 4 supports family members from outside the area being included as Federally-qualified users on the Yukon River.

Table 5 supports limiting fishing to Federally-qualified subsistence users who live in the community year round and that a quota system should be instituted so that the upper and lower river are harvesting equitable shares of fish. A harvest calendar should be reinstated to keep track of subsistence harvest.

Table 6 supports family members from outside the area being included as Federally-qualified users on the Yukon River and states this would be a moot question if the State of Alaska recognized the Federal rural preference.

Table 7 unanimously voted against using the Federally-qualified user restriction for concerns about enforcement and not allowing family members to participate and do not believe that the restriction will accomplish management goals.

Table 8 is three for and two against. Some families practice conservation on their own, community input is needed on this question.

Table 10 does not support limiting fishing to Federally-qualified users because most nonresidents do not fish in areas that are controlled by Federal jurisdiction, there are enforcement concerns, there is not much additional catch taken by people from outside the area and families need to have the opportunity to participate in these fisheries.

Table 11 has confusion about where State and Federal waters begin and end, there should be some type of education system before any regulation like this is put into place and elders may need assistance fishing from family living outside the area. Restricting outsiders with no family ties is acceptable.

Mr. Jim Houser stated enforcement is not easy and you're basically relying on the honesty of the folks that you check to tell you where their primary residence is. A restriction on family members from out of the area assisting with fishing to help elders and family members that could not do it alone is not seen as something critical to be restricted, but if the Board does want it enforced they need to make it very clear to everybody that it will be strictly enforced.

Mr. Robert Walker asked if giving away parts considered to be waste to people from out of the area was illegal.

Mr. Houser stated items considered waste would not be pursued.

TOPIC #2: VOLUNTARY RESTRICTIONS

Mr. Hayes discussed Topic 2 which is can people reduce their harvest if needed. Managers can't do it all, there are regulations that can be used to restrict harvest, but they don't always work. If current projections are correct the run will not be large enough to meet subsistence needs and people need to take less than what they need because there is not enough fish. The idea behind the seven and a half inch mesh is that more smaller male fish will be caught as opposed to the larger female fish, but that maybe this harvest could be reduced also. This is not something that is considered to last forever, but needs to be addressed at this time. Large summer and fall chum runs are projected and people might think about shifting the harvest to these species instead of king salmon.

Mr. Hale stated the questions for topic 2. Assuming the run projections are correct subsistence fishers will not be able to harvest as many kings as normal and still meet spawning escapement goals, are there steps you and others in your community can take to make up for that reduced harvest to ensure food on the table and if so what steps can you take; and understanding the necessity of spawning are you personally willing to take fewer king salmon, yes or no.

Mr. Hayes stated that this topic needs to be discussed with each person's community.

Table 11 unanimously agreed that voluntary reductions are possible and that it takes soul searching and a community effort to get the word out to change individual fishing patterns. One possible alternative to fishing kings is more reliance on summer and fall chum which can be put up as needed. Listening to Native people could help design new research questions and give a better understanding of contributing factors. There should be emphasis on educating and informing the communities and involving young people in the process.

Table 5 said there are steps that can be taken toward voluntary reduction and most people are willing to take fewer king salmon and focus more on chum and other species in high abundance. An educational program to allow people to see how the other side lives would be helpful. One community uses a community fishwheel which reduces overall harvest by sharing. The need for spawning is understood and perhaps habitat enhancement could be done on the upper part of the river.

Table 8 voted unanimously yes to both parts A and B. Most people agreed they're already taking voluntary reductions so this is something that can be done because it's already being done. Substituting other species for king salmon is already going on and can be increased.

Table 3 had one abstention and another said they couldn't take a position on the issue, but commented that it was culturally difficult to tell people to take fewer fish than they need and there were worries about implementing temporary conservation strategies that become permanent and that they have a limited drying period and windows makes it difficult. One person will take the message back to the community and another person said that as a community that they can share, they can spread the fish out more and canned fish lasts longer so if you can the fish you can stretch it out farther.

Table 7 agreed that targeting fish species other than salmon or taking more moose, waterfowl, berries, beaver make up for reduced harvests of salmon. Other ideas included letting elders or their relatives fish at setnets so that elders get what they need, avoiding fishing times that are optimal for king salmon and ways to set the net to avoid targeting king salmon. A concern was raised about the seven and a half inch mesh because harvests have increased and that the big fish genetics are not there anymore which may be contributing to a longer term lower production problem. People are willing to reduce harvests because they are already doing it, but it takes everybody doing it to make a difference and when you restrict voluntarily then you can better influence the management process, your voice is a bit stronger because you've taken the first steps to conserve.

Table 10 stated that individually people said they would be willing to reduce their harvest voluntarily, but nobody was willing to speak for the village and this question should have been presented in advance in order to obtain village input and that Fish and Game should go to the villages and educate residents on how poor the run is likely to be. There are things that people can switch to if need be, but it is important that everybody honor prescribed restrictions prior to expecting people to voluntarily reducing their individual efforts.

Table 2 stated that yes, there were things that the community could do and yes, people were willing and most said they already had changed their harvest. It will be difficult for everybody to cut back and the impact should be equally distributed including to people doing customary trade.

Table 6 stated you're asking one community to make sacrifices when they don't know what the other 50 communities are going to do, it has to be a universal request and feels they are making sufficient sacrifice by not fishing during the first pulse. They are willing to make a 50 percent reduction in the second and third pulse and that more sacrifice needs to be asked of the fishermen in the ocean. Other species of fish could be used to survive on.

Table 4 answered yes to both question A and B, one member said it was contingent that his yes would provide an opportunity to fish when fishing is better primarily on the first pulse, but reductions would be easier made on the second and later pulses. A lot of communication is necessary between the villages and between users and that reductions should be taken by all users in all area. A letter could be sent to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council and maybe more steps could be taken by them as well as the issue with customary trade reduction during times of voluntary reduction. Options to use other food sources and the reliance on the subsistence resource is somewhat less because of increase in employment opportunities.

TOPIC #3: SALE OF INCIDENTALLY CAUGHT KING SALMON

Dr. Schmidt presented a graph showing the average percent of Canadian bound chinook in runs from 2005 through 2011 from early to mid June, mid June to the end of June and then in July. The average in July during this period is around 24 percent but can range from 16 to 31 percent. Approximately one-third of the total run in July passes Pilot Station. These numbers exclude 2006. There is a greater percent of Canadian bound chinook passing Pilot Station in July in even numbered years.

Mr. Andrew asked if there is any data that provides size and sex information in the commercial fishery catch with a restricted opening.

Mr. Hayes stated that in 2011 there were about 4,000 chinook that were incidentally harvested during directed summer chum commercial periods in the lower river with an average weight of 12 pounds and approximately 70 percent male. Not all of these fish were Canadian bound. These fish have been processed by Kwikpak and shared with communities in Alaska and Canada.

Dr. Schmidt stated in 2011 26 percent of the incidental kings were bound for Canada.

Mr. Hale stated question number 3 is when should sale of incidentally caught king salmon be allowed. Options are never, early July or some other answer.

Table 5 stated that incidentally caught kings should never be sold during times of subsistence restriction. Allowing kings to be sold may cause targeting of kings or purposeful fishing in areas where kings can more easily be caught. The commercial fishery should not get more fish than subsistence users especially if there are restrictions. The transportation of incidentally caught kings to Canadian communities should be encouraged and continued and could potentially take the pressure off of the Canadians to try and get their own fish if their harvests are supplemented by incidentally caught kings from the lower river. These rules should apply river-wide in both the summer and fall seasons. The pollock fleet is policing their bycatch of chinook and selling our own incidentally caught salmon is hypocritical.

Table 2 was split between selling incidentally caught kings in July and unrestricted sale of incidentally caught kings. Most folks in the lower river are done putting their kings up by the end of June and it would be difficult for those fish to be absorbed into the subsistence fishery. Most targeting of kings will be eliminated with gear restrictions of six inches or less.

Table 3 had one firm yes, one for July with the comment that it should be allowed during commercial fishery because the majority of fish harvested in the six inch fishery are small males.

Table 6 stated no sales of incidentally caught salmon in the commercial fishery.

Table 7 felt that incidentally caught salmon should never be sold because subsistence should be the priority and incidentally caught fish should go to subsistence users. Allowing sales might encourage more catching of incidentally caught salmon.

Table 8 stated that early July is okay for the sale of incidentally caught salmon.

Table 10 stated that king salmon should never be sold under current conditions.

Table 11 stated that by the time the directed chum season open most people are done subsistence fishing so it can be difficult to find people to give incidentally caught salmon to. The sale is helpful because the profit made on the incidentally caught kings goes towards gas and other subsistence expenses. There were some reservation expressed about selling kings before other uses on the river get their subsistence needs met. There are a variety of other options for incidentally caught kings other than the sale and that those should be pursued.

Table 4 mostly felt that incidentally caught kings should never be sold, one person felt July would be okay and one other. There was discussion that as long as these fish could be used for subsistence then that should be done and if fishermen were give the option of donating their incidentally caught salmon to the processor if there could be a reward of fuel credits and the processor could move those fish to other communities. One person specifically wanted these fish to go to Canada. Sales could be capped and other options looked at once the cap is met.

BREAKOUT WORKSHOPS:

Dr. Schmidt stated that the salmon science workshop is an opportunity for discussion about factors that influence different lifestages of salmon from eggs to spawners, what is happening to the salmon, what can be done about it, what do we need to know more about.

Mr. Estensen will be giving a short presentation on fall chum runs.

Ms. Brown will review the history of subsistence harvest of chinook salmon on the Yukon, current status of restrictions and steps towards Tier II.

Mr. Hale stated the commercial processor panel will present a processor from the lower, middle and upper river who will provide updates on their operations followed by an open discussion.

FALL CHUM:

Mr. Estensen showed a graph of the fall chum run reconstruction for 1974 through 2011 and explained its components and use, gave an overview of harvest patterns for subsistence fishing, discussed the distribution of commercial fisheries and presented the forecast for the fall chum run.

Mr. Estensen stated that not much is known about coho on the Yukon River drainage and is probably the biggest information gap in the Yukon. There is no forecast, but they do have an informal outlook that looks at the pair year escapement of 2008 which was below average both in escapement and in run size and would equate to a below average to average run for coho, but is sufficient for subsistence, escapement and commercial harvest.

Table 6 stated that five or six years ago two smokehouses in Holy Cross with 40 or 50 chum hanging and at night the fish glowed green and the whole smokehouse was lit up and is wondering if anybody did any studies on glowing fish.

Mr. Estensen stated there was a green, florescent bacteria on the fish that did not affect the quality or health of the fish.

Mr. Bassich asked if increased pressure on the fall chum due to decreased pressure on kings has been accounted for in escapement and subsistence needs.

Mr. Estensen stated the number 1 priority is subsistence and escapement. Management will proceed cautiously to see what the in-season assessments reveal.

Mr. Bassich asked what the transition point is as far as the date when you go from preseason projection to in-season numbers.

Mr. Estensen stated that by regulation the fall season in Districts 1, 2, 3 begins on July 16th, and is called the transition period. Genetic studies over the years reveal the majority of these fish are summer chum.

A question was asked about the missing data years on coho.

Mr. Estensen stated there were a lot of fish mis-apportioned and this year is not a reliable data point and is not being reported.

Mr. Bassich commented that fall commercial chum fishermen to have a high incidental bycatch of sheefish, burbot and grayling.

Mr. Pappas asked what the potential harvest for subsistence users of fall chums is, hundreds of thousands of fish, tens of thousands of fish.

Mr. Estensen stated things have changed with fall chum with people not needing them for dog food. The potential harvest is unknown, but on a year with no restrictions and 1.2 million fish they did make ANS of 80,000 fish. ANS might be higher if people replace kings with chum.

Mr. Pappas stated that if the run comes in as forecasted even double harvest will not damage the biological outlook.

Mr. Estensen stated they've had some high abundance years and subsistence harvests have been pretty consistent. ANS for fall chum is 89,500 to 167,900.

SUBSISTENCE LAW:

Ms. Brown gave a presentation on the history of subsistence harvest of chinook on the Yukon, the restrictions experienced over the last couple of years as well as additional restrictions and a possible Tier II.

Mr. Andrew asked who develops the criteria in the Nome subdistrict for the Tier II guidelines.

Ms. Brown stated that the Board essentially does that in cooperation with the Nome Salmon Working Group, the staff and the public.

Mr. Andrew asked if there was any litigation as a result of the criteria that was developed and is the Nome subdistrict still in a Tier II status.

Ms. Brown stated that it ended in 2005.

Mr. Sandone stated that it's still on the books, but it has not been implemented since 2005.

Ms. Brown stated there were some people in the Nome subdistrict who got permits who did have a long history of fishing in the area, but did not take the largest percentage of their fish from that area. There was concern expressed by some families with long histories that did not get permits. Fewer people applied for permits in 2000 than did in 1999 because a lot of people didn't get permits and there were only nine days of fishing in 1999 and half the permits were issued.

Ms. Brown stated that there is a wide disparity in usage on the Yukon and it would be difficult to come up with a bag limit that would limit everybody equally.

Mr. Sandone asked who brought this to the Board of Fish or did the Board of Fish.

Mr. Bassich stated he wasn't at that Board meeting, but there was discussion of whether to close all fishing for five years to let the run rebuild or if there was some small surplus then allow the harvest and then the Tier II discussion was how you obtained that small harvest.

Mr. Andrew asked what the Board can do to initiate a Tier II.

Ms. Brown stated it was the Board's prerogative, but more demand than supply is a Tier II situation.

Mr. Demoski stated the community of Nulato is against the permit system and is an additional reason why a permit system will not work on the Yukon.

Ms. Brown stated this is one of the challenges they face because a permit system on the entire Yukon is a challenge just because of its size and the complicated nature of the fishery. Tier II is the tool available to the Board of Fish to significantly limit harvest.

A comment was made that ANILCA provides the native rural user with priority preference in years of low abundance and that Federal managers could take over management on State property.

Ms. Brown stated that a Tier II is a State system, but the Federal 804 process is similar.

A question was asked how Canadian escapement will play into this process.

Ms. Brown stated treaty obligations have to be kept in mind as far as putting fish across the border for escapement and subsistence use. By treaty the Canadians are to receive 23 percent of whatever the run is prior to meeting Alaska subsistence needs.

Mr. Bassich commented the State subsistence law states traditional use of wild, renewable resources by resident domiciled in rural area of the state and asked if this meant a preference.

Ms. Brown stated that is the State subsistence law, but because of the McDowell case the definition of a subsistence user is no longer limited to rural residents, but all State residents are equal potential subsistence users.

Mr. Bassich stated one of the triggers for going to Tier II is based on ANS and asked what determines the ANS range for each species.

Mr. Brown stated ANS is determined by species by the low and high harvest from the 10 years prior to the determination, 1990 to 1999. Part of the reason for distinguishing by species even though there is fluidity in harvest as species run together, there are people who target one species over another as well as different harvest and customary and traditional use histories. Subsistence law states that one species cannot be used to make up for another decline or restriction of another species unless you're in a Tier II.

Mr. Bassich stated that the definition of ANS on the Yukon River may force the Board of Fish to do something it does not need to do. ANS means are you putting enough food on the table and this is what the criteria should be based rather than a specific species. The State and Federal managers should work together to not force the Board of Fish into a Tier II situation.

A question was asked that on the Yukon River there is declining chinook salmon and an abundant summer chum salmon which provides for a commercial fishery on the lower Yukon and has interaction with chinook salmon and how will this affect the commercial fishery and will it create an over-escapement problem in the summery chum resources.

Ms. Brown stated that all comments made today are equally important to this discussion and the Board of Fish will be looking to us to talk to them about this.

REVISION OF THE KING SALMON MANAGEMENT PLAN:

Mr. Hale stated that a draft proposal for revision of the King Salmon Management Plan is being prepared for submission to the Board of Fish. Mr. Hale read a list of questions for the participants to answer on their questionnaires.

Proposals to the Board of Fish are due next Tuesday.

PRESENTATION OF THE PRESEASON PLAN:

Mr. Fred Bue thanked the participants for their input today and throughout the year.

TOPIC #1: FEDERALLY-QUALIFIED SUBSISTENCE USERS

Discussion included that it would give people living closest to the resource a priority; there were other concerns like more input from the tribal communities; how many fish could it actually save; it may cause confusion and will be difficult to enforce; may handicap those people living on the river that are relying on the subsistence resource may be needing people from outside the area to help them fish.

The decision at this point is that it is highly unlikely and users should not count on it taking place.

TOPIC #2: VOLUNTARY RESTRICTIONS

A high majority of respondents said they could reduce their harvest and they may be asked to reduce by as much as 50 percent depending on run size.

TOPIC #3: SALE OF INCIDENTALLY CAUGHT KING SALMON

Most people were not supportive of the sale of kings when subsistence restrictions are in place, those fish could be sent to other areas to help people that aren't getting their needs met. The decision is that there will be no sale of incidentally caught king salmon in June; July sales will depend on the run; August sales will depend on the run.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE COMING SEASON:

Windows will begin around May 30 in Y1, about one week earlier than last year with the goal of conserving some fish rather than just shifting the harvest. The first pulse is planned to be protected. If the second pulse continues to be weak there will be a second pulse closure. If the run continues to be weak there are options such as restricting gear size to six inch maximum, reducing window length and possibly a third pulse closure.

COMMERCIAL FISHERY:

It is not anticipated that there will be a king fishery on the Yukon River. Summer chum outlook is 1.5 to 2 million summer chum for a surplus of 500,000 to 1 million, however commercial availability depends on the king run. The sale of incidentally caught kings will be prohibited in June and reassessed in July and August. An out of cycle proposal to the Board of Fish will allow the Kaltag area fishery to use a fishwheel for its summer chum commercial fishery as the kings will have to be released alive. The Tanana River fishery is a terminal fishery and is managed based on escapement for the Chena and Salcha Rivers. As long as escapements goals are being met a summer chum commercial fishery will be allowed.

SPORT FISH:

The main stem of the Yukon will be closed to sport fishing to protect Canadian bound fish; the bag limit will be reduced from three to one for the tributaries other than the Tanana.

YUKON ADVISORY GROUP:

Mr. Estensen stated the Yukon Advisory Group is made up of 16 members and operate under the Yukon Treaty Act which allows that panel members have authority to give input on issues that are relevant to Yukon fisheries. This group meets during key management issues, for example, additional pulse

protection, start of a summer chum fishery and potential management strategies for fall chum in light of preseason projections. The group also meets to review season summaries and outlooks prior to panel meetings. The Advisory Group does not make management decisions, but provide input to management to make a more informed decision.

Mr. Hayes stated that the Yukon Advisory Group worked well, but still would encourage fishermen to contact the Department directly with their input.

FINAL COMMENTS:

Mr. Hale thanked everybody for coming out, it's a big deal for so many people to come together.

Dr. Schmidt has copies of her presentation available for participants to take back to their communities.

Ms. Amanda Wiese stated these meetings are really important and stated that a lot of people were on their phones during the entire meetings.

A comment was made that fish in the Porcupine River were not being counted and that all the treaties need to be respected and that the pollock industry should not get a free pass.

Mr. Andy Bassich reiterated that managers can't fix the problem, the users have to fix it and make tough decisions and sacrifices.

A comment was made that the meeting facilitators also need to take the message back to their people.

Mr. Hale adjourned the meeting at 5:30.