

Yukon River Panel, Communications Committee  
**Project CC-01-06**

Yukon River In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences, 2006  
Final Report

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

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## ABSTRACT

Given the complexity of fisheries management on the Yukon River, the vast size of the drainage, and the reality of short timelines, teleconferences are a practical method for discussing fisheries management. Yukon River in-season management teleconferences have occurred since 1994 and provide valuable insights from local users into management strategies. Teleconferences enable managers and fishers an opportunity to work together by making information on location, abundance and quality of salmon available. Additionally, teleconferences provide a combination of research and monitoring tools as well as local observations by fishers. The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) hosted in-season teleconferences during the 2006 salmon fishery on a weekly basis. The teleconferences were held every Tuesday at 1:00pm Alaska time. Teleconference summaries were written and distributed to teleconference participants. In total, fourteen (14) teleconferences were held from May 30 through August 29, 2006.

Members of the public, Yukon River fishermen and community members, state and federal agencies, Tribal non-profits, fish processors and others participated on the teleconference by tracking the run and listening to management decisions. This was the fifth year the Canadians participated. Alaskan managers and Canadian managers communicated regularly throughout the run to share test fishery, run projection and border passage and timing. There was varied participation from Yukon River communities, agency personnel, fishers, tribal non-profits staff and fish processors. Some communities along the river and some organizations did not participate in the teleconference calls.

Funding for the Yukon River In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences was supported by the Yukon River Panel-Communications Committee and the US Fisheries Information Service-Office of Subsistence Management.

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

**Citation:** M. Illenberg, D. King, J. Klein, 2006. Yukon River In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences. Yukon River Panel: Communications Committee #CC-01-06. Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, Anchorage, Alaska.

## INTRODUCTION

The Yukon River is the largest river in Alaska and is the fifth largest drainage in North America. The river starts in British Columbia, Canada and flows over 2,300 miles to its mouth on the Bering Sea, draining an area approximately 330,000 square miles. Approximately 138,000 people live within the Yukon River drainage. Within the Alaskan portion of the drainage excluding the largest city of Fairbanks (approximately 86,000 residents), the majority of the remaining 21,000 Alaska residents live in 43 communities scattered along the river system from the Canadian border to the coast along the Bering Sea. These communities range in population from 30 to 800 residents with an average of less than 300 residents. Within the Canadian portion of the drainage, Whitehorse, the largest city with a population of 23,000 and Dawson City with a population of 1,800, comprise nearly 80% of the Yukon Territory population. Nearly 4,000 people reside outside of these larger towns along the Yukon River and its tributaries. These rural communities range in size from 50 to 450 residents.

The people of the Yukon River drainage have long utilized salmon since inhabiting the area. In predominantly Native communities, fishing means more than just food, as it is part of a traditional, cultural, and economic system. Three major ethnic groups have historically occupied the Yukon River drainage: Yup'ik Eskimo, who live along the Bering Sea coast and inland approximately 250 miles (402 km); Athabaskan Indians, who occupy the remainder of the Yukon River valley; and Tlingit Indians [distantly related to the Athabaskan family], live along the southeast Alaskan coast and inland into parts of Yukon Territory and British Columbia, Canada. Outside of the larger cities, nearly all the people who reside in the Yukon River drainage are dependent, to varying degrees, on fish and wildlife resources for their livelihood. The Yukon River supports both subsistence and commercial fisheries.

Fisheries management is complex on the Yukon River due to the vast size of the drainage, the complexity of use, and the need for timely information. Teleconferences are a practical method for bringing together various fishers that use the salmon resource. Yukon River in-season management teleconferences have occurred since 1994 and provide valuable insights from local users into management strategies. Teleconferences make information available on location, abundance and quality of salmon. Additionally, teleconferences enable fishers and managers to work together to manage the salmon fisheries by providing/ reviewing information on research and monitoring tools, as well as local observations by fishers.

The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YR DFA) has hosted in-season salmon management teleconferences for twelve years. During that time the management of the fishery became increasingly multifaceted with dual management by the State of Alaska (Alaska Department of Fish and Game) and the U.S. federal government (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). Teleconferences provide a vital role in creating a feedback loop within Yukon River fisheries management districts. They are a means for both state and federal managers to gain input from fishers during the fishing season as it helps with management decision-making. YR DFA has continued to bring diverse salmon users together through these teleconferences, and the public benefits from having the opportunity to communicate during the salmon fishing season.

## OBJECTIVES

The goal of this project is to maintain and expand communication and information sharing on all aspects of annual salmon runs among diverse Yukon salmon fishery users and managers. YRDFA's direct involvement in this project helps to keep local Yukon River residents informed by increasing their capacity to gain information and participate in the fisheries management process. YRDFA achieved this by:

- Maintaining and expanding communication and information sharing between the Yukon salmon fishery users and agency staff through in-season teleconferences.
- Fostering increased participation and consistent reporting from fishers to managers.
- Working with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADFG), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Yukon River Salmon Committee, Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Ocean, Canada to ensure sharing of timely in-season management information among fishers and managers.
- Documenting distribution and abundance of salmon in the Yukon River drainage.

## METHODS

The previous years' weekly teleconference agenda was reviewed and revised in order to improve upon the information exchanged and gathered during the teleconference calls. This year's agenda included village identification and subsistence reports; management updates and strategy and local input (by YRDFA Board, Coordinating Fisheries Committee, non-profits, public, etc.) and closing comments. During subsistence reports, all fishermen were encouraged to answer the following questions:

- 1) Are your catches up or down and what is your assessment of run strength?
- 2) How far along are fishers in their subsistence harvests?
- 3) What is the quality of the fish?
- 4) What are the current water conditions?

A pre-season letter was sent out to YRDFA board members, Regional Council members and Tribal non-profits (Appendix A). Faxes were sent out to villages and Tribal offices informing them of the teleconference protocols, the agenda and logistical details of the teleconferences. A poster announcing the teleconference was mailed out to villages, tribal offices, state and federal agencies prior to the season as well (Appendix B).

USFWS Refuge Information Technicians (RIT) from Yukon River communities were encouraged to participate in every teleconference call to provide timely information regarding the fisheries: how many households surveyed and how many are fishing, gear used, quantity and quality of catch, and water conditions. Federal agency managers, who oversee the RIT projects, acknowledge the importance of these in-season catch interviews and use them to help assess where households are at with regards to meeting their subsistence needs.

The YRDFA Executive Director facilitated in-season management teleconferences once a week during the 2006 fishing season. The teleconferences were held every Tuesday at 1300 hours (Alaska Time). Teleconference summaries, detailing announcements of the management

decisions, management rationale and key points of subsistence users and public, were written in a timely manner and emailed to participants and posted on YRDFA's website. In total, 14 teleconference calls were held between May 30, 2006 and August 29, 2006. YRDFA's Communication & Outreach Coordinator was charged with the responsibility of taking minutes and preparing summaries for each weekly teleconference call.

## **RESULTS**

During the period of May 30 to August 29, 2006 fourteen (14) in-season management teleconferences were organized and carried out by YRDFA. Participation in the teleconferences varied throughout the season. Many village fishing communities, agencies, tribal organizations, fish processors and others participated throughout the fishing season (Figures 1-3). Participation was highest at the beginning of the season when Chinook (Figure 4) and fall chum salmon runs (Figure 5) started entering the river. The level of teleconference participation tracked more closely with the number of fish coming through the lower part of the river, rather than with the upper river (Figure 4-9), even though community participation varied by location and was not generally limited to communities of the lower river. Nor were lower river communities the most consistent participants; consistent community participation varied river-wide. Some communities participated infrequently or not at all. Therefore, the level and consistency of participation varied throughout the season; this could be an indication of the following:

- a. Participants take part in the teleconference mainly to track when the salmon runs start entering the river.
- b. A majority of the teleconference participants were interested in the lower river as occurrences (i.e. commercial openings, runs entering the river, etc) in that region have a great impact on fisheries throughout the rest of the drainage.
- c. Fishermen were sufficiently meeting their needs, so didn't have to track the runs once the season progressed.

Brief summaries (approximately 2 pages in length) of the fourteen teleconference calls were written, detailing run assessment, subsistence updates, management decisions and strategies, and key points from participants, and sent to teleconference participants on a weekly basis (Appendix C).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Participation**

YRDFA had requested regular and consistent participation throughout the season, but people's participation followed the salmon fluctuations. Poor runs and unmet harvest requirements necessitate community participation in teleconference calls so that in-season management decisions are based on the needs of the people on the river. During a season when salmon returns are sufficient, or more than sufficient, to meet subsistence/aboriginal and commercial harvests, fewer individuals participate in teleconference calls as there are generally fewer changes to management strategies and schedules.

Community participation seemed to also depend whether the individual participant held a fisheries-related job, or not, within their community. For example, tribal administrators, Refuge Information Technicians (RITs) and in-season harvest interviewers participated more frequently than those not holding a fisheries-related job.

This was the fifth year that Canadian fishers and management entities, such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, participated. However, Canadian community participation was low, compared to Alaskan community participation, as only 6 communities participated and only 2 of those communities (Mayo and Old Crow) were consistent participants.

Overall, those that participated did so to discuss, share, distribute and understand information regarding run status, run strength and location of pulse; water conditions, open/closure of commercial fishery; proposed regulatory changes/ changes to in-season management decisions/ restrictions to subsistence fishing; traditional ecological knowledge; notices in climate change throughout the drainage; and anecdotal information from non-technical people (fishermen's observations, impressions, assessments).

There were also participants that passively participated (listen only) and did not announce themselves. Unfortunately, YRDFA was unable to track these participants as they usually mentioned after the fact that they had been on the call. All participation, whether passively listening or actively engaged in dialogue, resulted in the sharing of in-season management and fishery information.

## **Reporting**

In addition to the consistent participation, consistent reporting that follows the agenda mentioned in the methodology section was important. In 2003 the agenda for the teleconferences was changed in order to collect consistent information river-wide. In an effort to utilize fishers' input, the managers were more flexible during the 2004, 2005 and 2006 season, and fishers gave substantial input to the managers on the teleconferences. Prior to 2003, there was no structured space for this input vital for information sharing. However, a difficulty with asking fishermen to answer specific questions is that they sometimes forget about the questions and tend to answer as they see fit - usually mentioning how many fish they caught in a time period or the water level and drift in the river. While this information is still useful, RITs and in-season harvest interviewers, having conducted in-season subsistence surveys in their region/community, presented their findings during the teleconference calls in a structured manner. Overall, reporting techniques differed slightly as participants had various ways of relaying information.

In relation to people being asked if their subsistence needs had been met, they usually responded by saying what percentage of their needs had been met. Some fishermen responded that the percentage reported was based on a rough guess or mental average based on visual observation of their harvest and input from other families. The fishermen, RITs, and in-season harvest interviewers also know if subsistence needs are being met in their community by:

- Visual observation of fishing activity/ visit with them and see what they have put away/ check smokehouses & drying racks;



- Previous knowledge & experience fishing, as well as in depth knowledge of the community and its families (how big a family is and if they share amongst their extended family and for what purpose they are fishing – dogs, memorial potlatch, etc.);
- Asking subsistence fishermen/ conducting personal surveys/ listening to what people are saying in the community and neighboring villages; and
- Witnessing mood of community (happy when good season, not happy when not doing well, disgust when windows fishing schedule doesn't coincide with salmon run and weather conditions).

Subsistence reporting on the teleconference calls is an important agenda item because managers gain a relative sense of where households are at with regards to meeting their subsistence needs, by discussing the fishery directly with fishermen. This mainly applies to Alaskan managers only, and not managers within the Yukon Territory. The First Nation fishery (equivalent to the Alaskan subsistence fishery) is open 7 days/week unless there are severe conservation concerns or a voluntary closure (such as in Old Crow for 2004). Therefore, managers with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada do not officially track the First Nation fishery in-season; however they do a post season assessment.

Alaskan managers also gain in-season fishery information by reviewing information gathered from in-season catch interviews collected by USFWS/YRDFA; and in-person & telephone conversations with state and federal agency personnel as well as other entities (such as federal Regional Advisory Council members) and individual fishers. When communicating with fishing families, managers interpret individual family information for consistency/ inconsistency with other families from the general area in terms of effective time allowed for fishing activities (i.e. some families choose to start later than others). Hearing in-season subsistence reports and what percentage of the local harvest has been met to date, helps managers to anticipate fishing activity yet to come and provides pieces of information to better understand the salmon run.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The teleconferences have proved a valuable resource for members of the public, Yukon River fishermen and community members, state and federal agencies, Tribal non-profits, fish processors and others. The in-season management teleconferences are a model for managers and local users on how to communicate and share information about the condition of salmon runs and the management strategies. As with the previous 3 years, the process this year once again stayed away from managers merely taking information from the fishers and informing them of their management strategy to fishers actually affecting the management strategy through their participation. Thus, the in-season management teleconference is still a good way for fishers to work toward cooperatively managing their fishery.

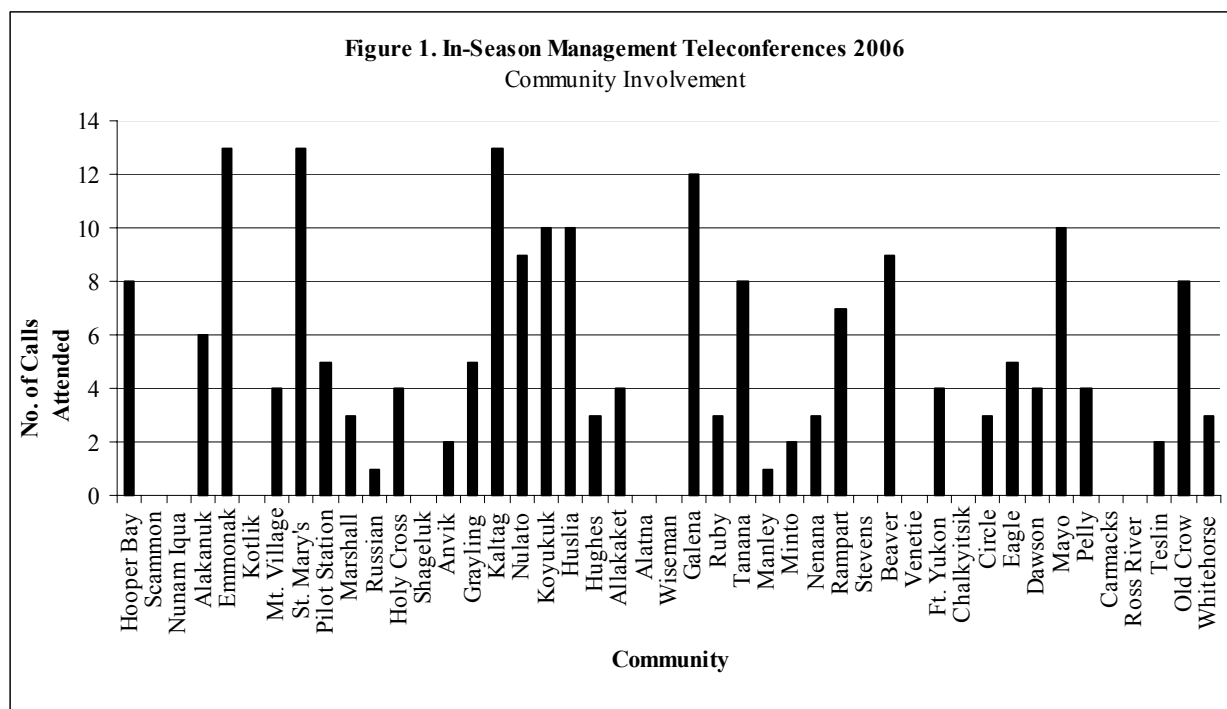
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for the Yukon River In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences was supported by the Yukon River Panel-Communications Committee and the US Fisheries Information Service-Office of Subsistence Management.

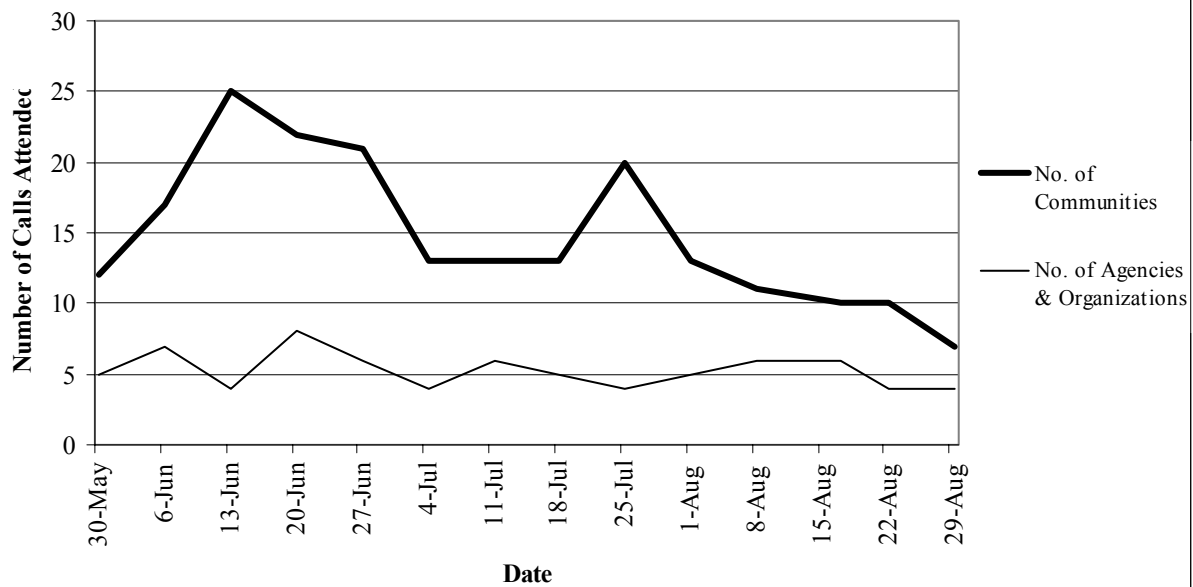
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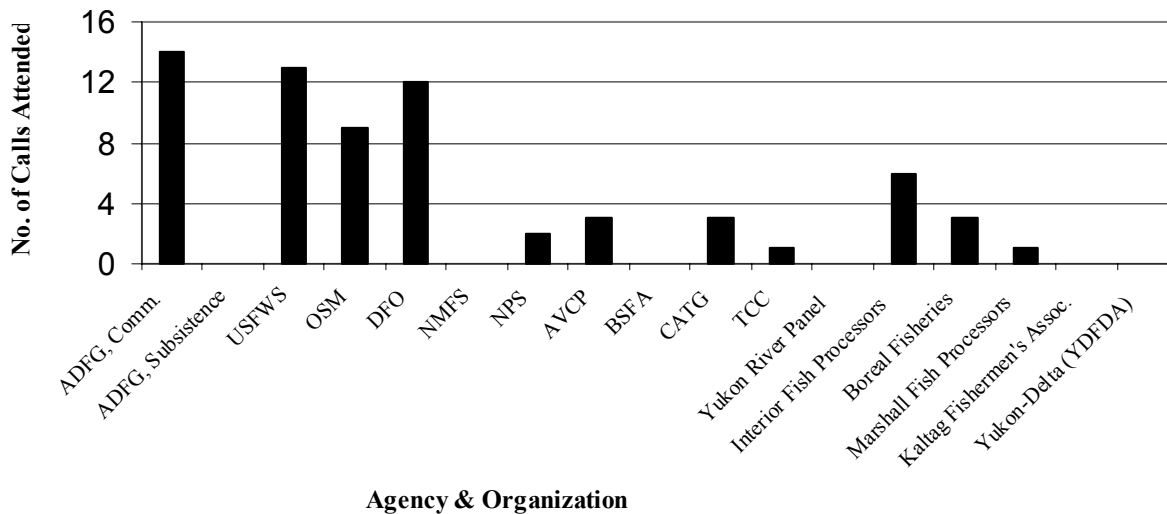
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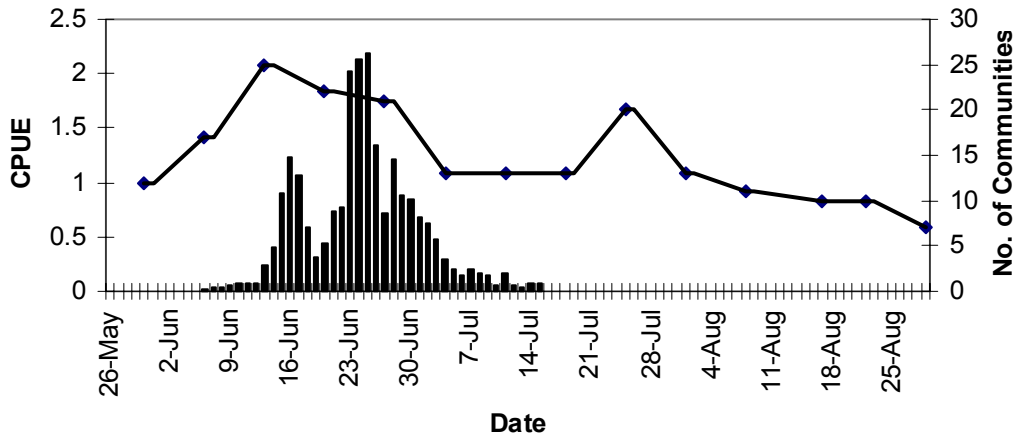
**Figure 2. In-Season Management Teleconferences 2006**  
 No. of Communities, Agences & Organizations Involved in each Call



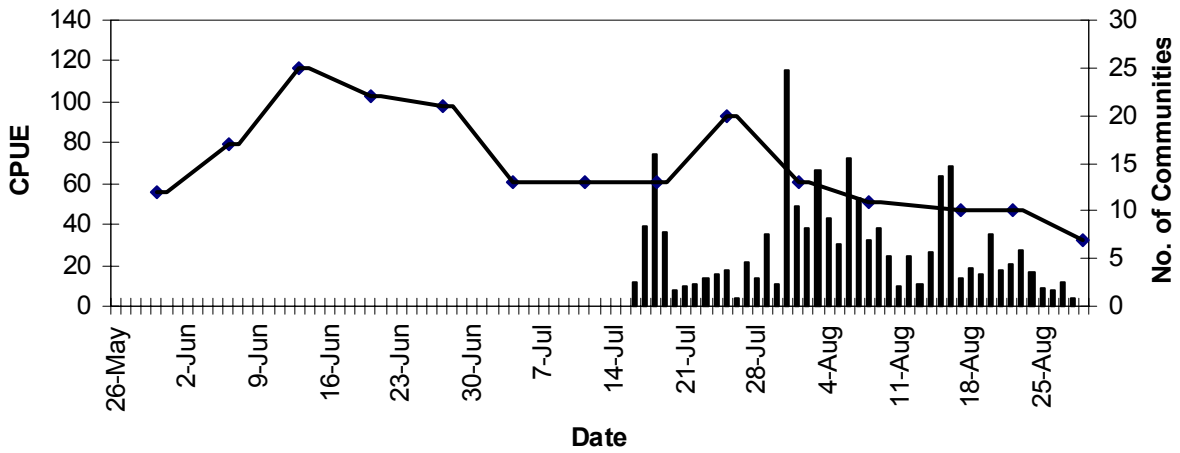
**Figure 3. In-Season Management Teleconferences 2006**  
 Agency & Organization Involvement



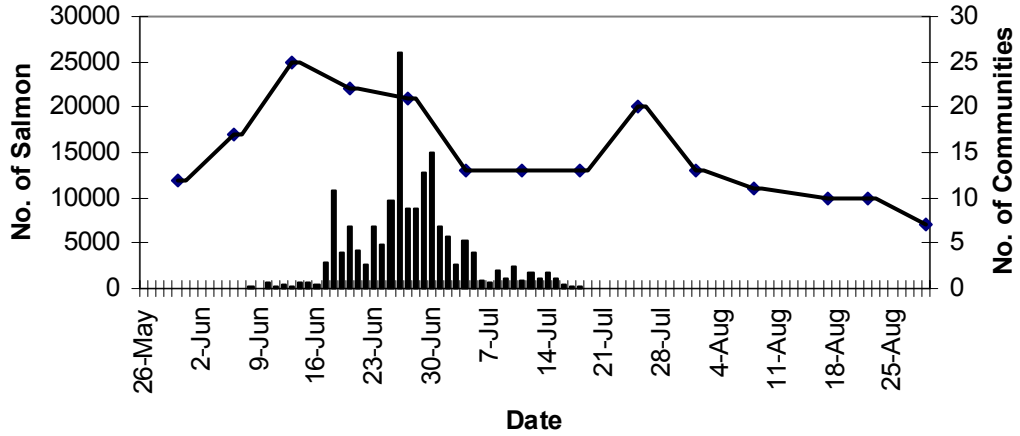
**Figure 4. 2006 In-Season Management Teleconferences:**  
 No. of Community Participants vs. Lower River Set Net Chinook Test Fishery Daily CPUE



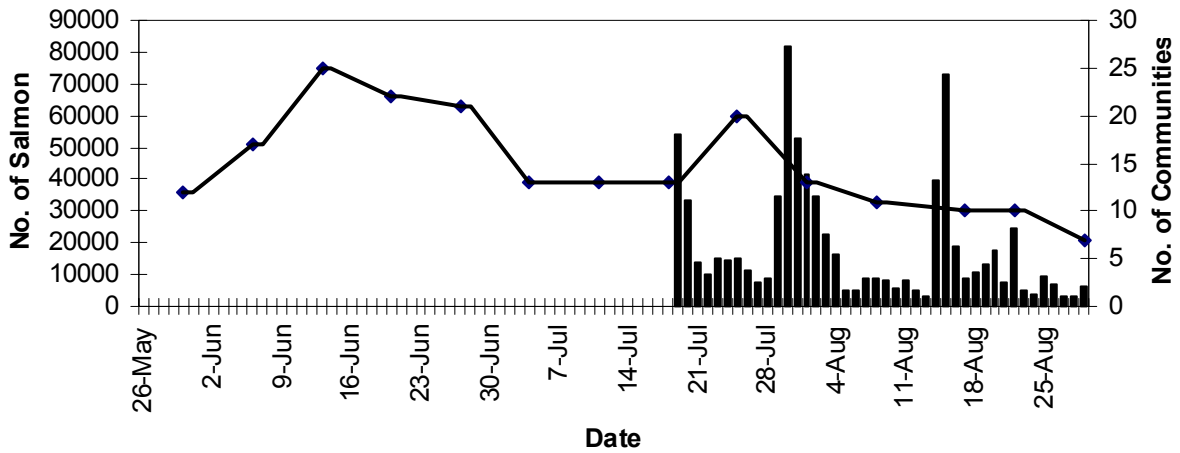
**Figure 5. 2006 In-Season Management Teleconferences:**  
 No. of Community Participants vs. Lower River Drift Net Test Fishery for Fall Chum Daily CPUE



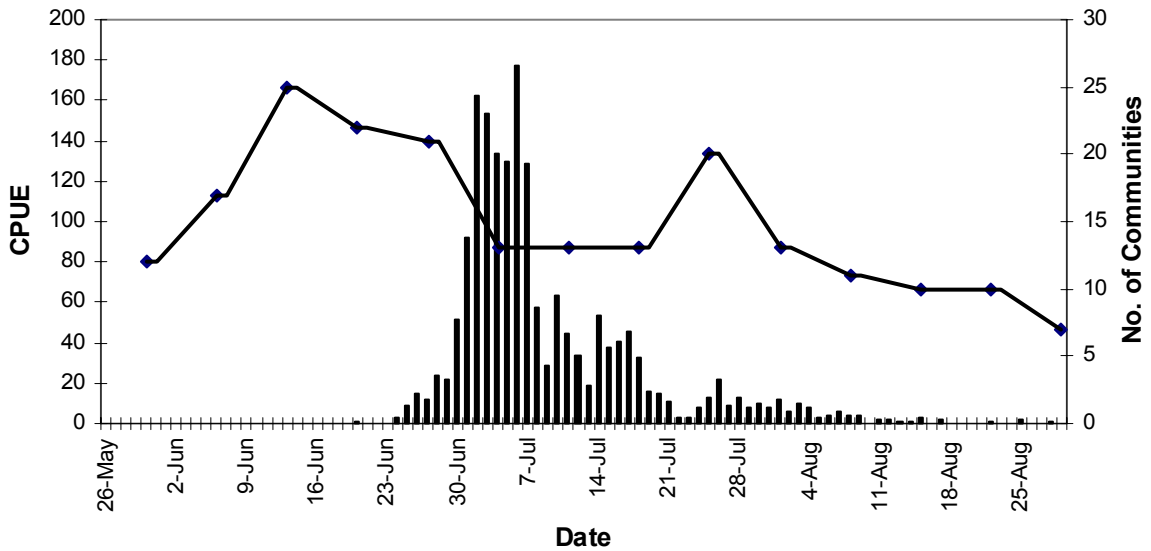
**Figure 6. 2006 In-Season Management Teleconferences:**  
 No. of Community Participants vs. Pilot Station Sonar Chinook Daily Passage Estimates



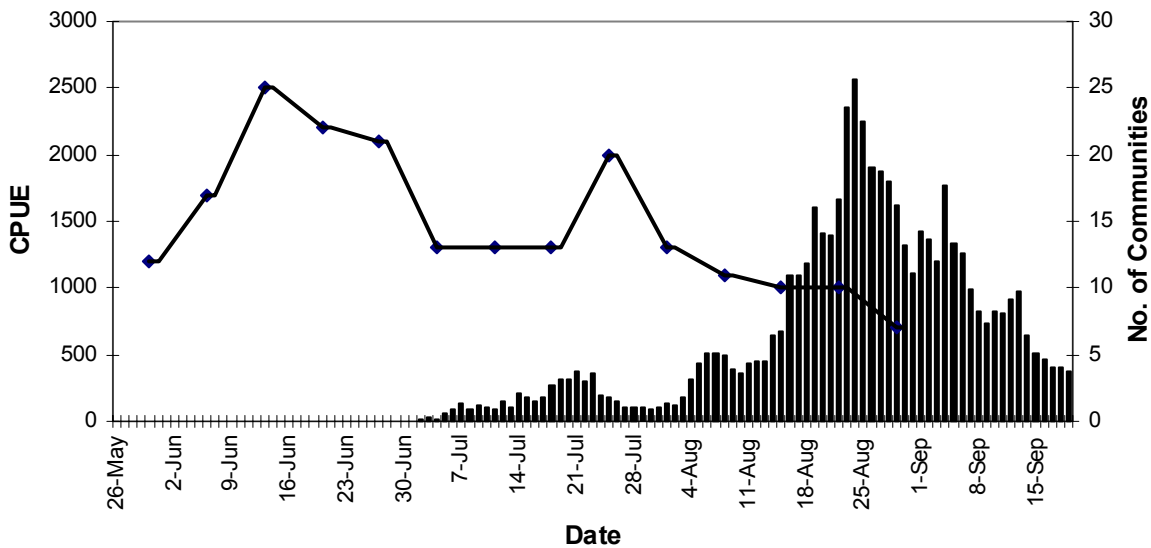
**Figure 7. 2006 In-Season Management Teleconferences:**  
 No. of Community Participants vs. Pilot Station Sonar Fall Chum Daily Passage Estimates



**Figure 8. 2006 In-Season Management Teleconferences:**  
No. of Community Participants vs. Rapids Chinook Daily CPUE



**Figure 9. 2006 In-Season Management Teleconferences:**  
No. of Community Participants vs. Rapids Fall Chum Daily CPUE



## Appendix A



### YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

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

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

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### **In-Season Management Teleconferences 2006**

The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) will sponsor in-season management teleconferences open to the public. The calls will start this **May 30<sup>th</sup> 2006** and last throughout the fishing season.

**Teleconference Number: 1-800-315-MEET (6338), participant code: 9966815#**

The mission of these teleconferences is to exchange information on run timing, abundance, and escapement data and discuss management strategies. The calls help facilitate dialogue between users and managers and between different users and villages up and down the river, including Yukon Territory, Canada.

All teleconference calls are scheduled for 1:00 pm on Tuesdays throughout the summer and fall fishing seasons. The teleconference will usually last 1 hour depending on the time of season. The call is open to the public, but YRDFA would like to promote a core group of fishermen that join in most of the calls and participate by either giving subsistence reports for their villages or providing input on the management strategy jointly proposed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and U.S Fish and Wildlife Service. This core group will work to ensure consistency in involvement and an avenue for fishers to participate regularly in management.

YRDFA board members, fishers, Federal Regional Advisory Council Coordinating Fishery Committee members, Refuge Information Technicians, Yukon River Panel members, State Advisory Committees, Tribal Councils, City offices and NGO's such as AVCP, TCC and CATG will be able to participate throughout the summer season and can provide comments and concerns as determined by test fishery indicators and subsistence reports.

YRDFA suggests designated locations such as Tribal Council or City offices be utilized as a central meeting location. A designated speaker to represent one of the above entities should be determined for consistent reporting and efficient use of time.

We look forward to your participation. Please contact Jill Klein, Executive Director or Mike Illenberg, Communication & Outreach Coordinator at 1-877-999-8566 if you have any questions or comments regarding teleconferences for this upcoming season.

Teleconferences are funded by USFWS Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

*see next page*

## **The teleconference agenda:**

- Village Identification & Subsistence Reports *See questions below to reference when reporting.*
- Management Update (by Alaska Department of Fish and Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
- Management Strategy
- Local Input (by YRDFA Board, Coordinating Fisheries Committee, non-profits & YR public comments)
- Closing Comments

## **The subsistence reports:**

- 1) Are your catches up or down and what is your assessment of run strength?
- 2) How far along are fishers in their subsistence harvests?
- 3) What is the quality of the fish?
- 4) What are the current water conditions?

The teleconferences are a place to express concerns, and YRDFA would like to emphasize the importance of speaking with a river-wide perspective. This perspective will increase understanding of how various parts of the river rely on the salmon fishery and raise awareness of how to make complex decisions during the fishing season.

## **The teleconferences support the following goals:**

- A river-wide perspective.
- Priority to meet escapement (this includes US/Canada treaty obligations).
- Priority use for subsistence fishers.
- Provide for other uses such as commercial fisheries, personal use and sport when there are enough fish.

## **The teleconference rules:**

- The call will be structured around one hour in duration. We will continue longer if needed, but people need to get back to work.
- State your name and village location before speaking.
- Calls will require brief, concise and short statements to enable all participants to communicate.
- Listen to others, be polite, and state your opinion clearly.

## **The teleconference number:**

1-800-315-MEET (6338), participant code: 9966815#



Appendix B

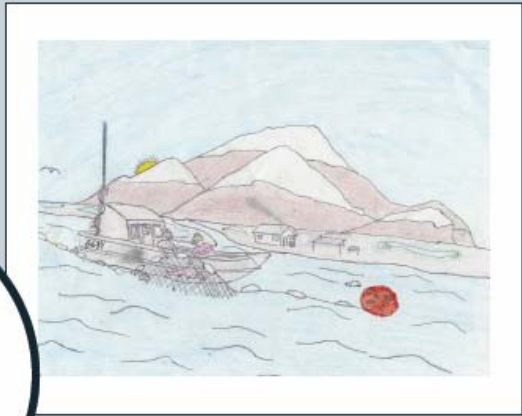


# Yukon River Salmon Fishery Teleconferences

Track the salmon runs and stay informed about Yukon River salmon fishery issues.



May 30 – September 4



**EVERY  
TUESDAY @  
1:00 P.M.**  
(ALASKA TIME)

Phone: 1-800-315-6338,  
conference code 9966815#



Yukon River Salmon Fishery  
Teleconferences are sponsored by  
the Office of Subsistence Management  
and the Yukon River Panel.

Teleconference calls are facilitated  
by the Yukon River Drainage  
Fisheries Association.



## Appendix C

### Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference Call #1 – May 30, 2006

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and The Yukon River Panel.

**Agenda:**

- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
- Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
- Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Hooper Bay, Alakanuk, Emmonak, Fairbanks, St. Mary's, Pilot Station, Marshall, Holy Cross, Grayling, Kaltag, Tanana, Ft. Yukon

#### Government and Other Organizations/Entities:

ADFG – Anchorage, Fairbanks
USFWS - Anchorage, Fairbanks, Bethel
AVCP – Hooper, Bethel
CATG
Yukon River Panel – Lake LaBarge

**Subsistence Reports:** Due to a late breakup many of the communities have not yet begun fishing nor have they seen salmon running. Most of the upriver communities are clear of ice and reporting moderate to high water levels. Overall, debris levels have been low. The lower river communities are nearing the end of breakup and report strong currents. Whitefish subsistence fishing is reported in Grayling, Shagluk, and Tanana, Marshall, Emmonak, and Holy Cross.

**Management updates:** Coastal ice is delaying the fish run timing. Assessment projects are just starting to gear up. Crews are on site in Emmonak and will begin to deploy test nets when water levels drop. Test fishing should start by the weekend and the Pilot Station sonar will be running by next week.

The 2006 king salmon run is projected to be average to below average. 1999 was a late breakup year. Commercial fishing did not start until around June 20. Although this year's run may not be as late as 1999, it will be latter than average. There is still the possibility that a ¼ point opening will occur on June 15<sup>th</sup> in Y-1 or Y-2 districts as discussed at the YRDFA annual meeting. At this time, it appears that if the opening does occur it will be limited by low fish numbers in the river. This opportunity will be discussed further on next Tuesday's call. The USFWS Andrafsky project will begin operating around June 15<sup>th</sup>, with counts starting on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference  
Call #2 – June 6, 2006**

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Emmonak, Fairbanks, Pilot Station, Galena, Mayo (Y.T.), Old Crow (Y.T.), Ft. Yukon, Beaver, Rampart, Tanana, Allakaket, Kaltag, Holy Cross, St. Mary’s, Mt. Village, Alakanuk, Hooper Bay.

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Fairbanks, Emmonak, Pilot Station
USFWS - Emmonak, Fairbanks, Galena
AVCP –
CATG – Ft. Yukon
Interior Fish Processors

**Subsistence Reports:** Water levels all along the river are moderately high and dropping. The majority of communities reported little to no debris. The upriver communities reported cold air temperatures. Holy Cross is having a fuel shortage which is keeping people off the river. Hooper Bay reported that herring seems late this year as well as salmon. There are not many subsistence nets out and there have only been some chum caught along with a jack. In Mt. Village the first king salmon of the season was caught on Sunday, June 4<sup>th</sup>. Overall there has been a low subsistence effort.

**Management updates:** The Pilot Station sonar has identified mostly sheefish and whitefish with no salmon reported yet. The USFWS crew at the Andraefsky Weir project is getting ready for the season. The run timing this year is late, similar to 1999. Nelson Island is seeing subsistence catches and there is still ice in the northern and middle mouths of the river.

**Additional comments:** There was a question about the link between water temperature and the salmon run timing. To the best of the teleconference participants’ knowledge there is no conclusive science available at this time.

In 1999 the salmon ran tight and late. The first salmon reported in set nets:

- First: June 6<sup>th</sup>
- ¼ pt.: June 22<sup>nd</sup>
- ½ pt.: June 25<sup>th</sup>
- ¾ pt.: June 29<sup>th</sup>

*Ichthyophonus* infection rates were also high in 1999.

**Market Report:**

Copper River King Harvest is low this year and, as a result, prices are high.

This call lasted approximately 50 minutes. The next conference call will be Tuesday, June 13<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 PM. ADT.

**Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference  
Call #3 – June 13, 2006**

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YR DFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YR DFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Hooper Bay, Alakanuk, Emmonak, Mt. Village, St. Mary’s, Marshall, Russian Mission, Holy Cross, Grayling, Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk, Allakaket, Galena, Nenana, Tanana, Beaver, Ft. Yukon, Circle, Eagle, Pelly, Mayo, Dawson, Old Crow, Teslin

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG, Commercial Fisheries Division – Steve Hayes, Kevin Clark (Emmonak); Dan Bergstrom (Anchorage); Fred Bue (Fairbanks); Dani Evenson, Bruce McIntosh (Pilot Station)
USFWS - Russ Holder, John Gerken, Andrew Kelly Sr. (Emmonak)
USFWS, OSM – Rod Campbell (Anchorage)
AVCP –
CATG – Craig Fleener
Boreal Fisheries; B.B. Kings; Interior Alaska Fish Processors
TCC – Mike Smith

**Subsistence Reports:** The lower river communities and Hooper Bay are reporting subsistence catches of primarily chum with few to no kings. There has been little subsistence effort overall to date, but it is starting to pick up in some lower river communities as far up as Grayling. Grayling reported one king caught so far. Overall the mainstem and upper-river is free of ice and debris. There are reports from the upriver communities that the water levels are dropping. Allakaket on the Koyukuk River and Pelly, Mayo and Teslin in the Yukon Territory were the exceptions with rising levels. At this time the upriver communities report no salmon fishing effort. Teslin reported excellent trout fishing. Up and down the river there is a focus on preparing for the season, setting up camps, and getting gear in order.

**Management updates:** ADF&G test fishery in Emmonak reported a very gradual increase in kings being caught but chums dominate the nets at this time. The king and chum passage numbers are expected to increase over the week and there is little concern beyond late run-timing. Pilot Station sonar reported increasing numbers of chum and the sonar is now fully operational.

***Discussion of the proposed lower river commercial opening for June 15<sup>th</sup>:***

The YR DFA delegation of 30 fishermen from the entire length of the Yukon River and fisheries management held lengthy discussions at the YR DFA annual meeting about a proposed June 15<sup>th</sup> commercial opening to meet market demands for Yukon River Salmon. The 15<sup>th</sup> is the average historical quarter-point of the Chinook run. Due to a lack of consensus over setting a date, a motion was passed to have a quarter point commercial opening (historically June 15) and to have the opening take place in Y-2. The goal of the early opening was to enable a small amount of good quality to fish to enter the

marketplace. This opening would not signal the beginning of the commercial season, if run size did not increase, in order to protect subsistence fishing in the upper portions of the Yukon River. This year due to late run timing, ADF&G and YRDFA facilitated discussion during the teleconference about the proposed opening. Feedback was provided by many participants during the call. Following is a list of key concerns provided by subsistence fishers, processors, commercial fishers and managers during the teleconference with fisheries management. This list summarizes the main points discussed and reflects concerns echoed by many participants:

- Many subsistence fishers expressed concern that there was not enough evidence yet that the run will be strong enough to support commercial openings and subsistence needs, therefore openings should be delayed to match the run-timing. (runs are later this year)
- Processor concerns are that in order to build a strong, sustainable commercial market it is necessary to distribute some - even limited amounts - of salmon to contracted buyers/consumers on a set date.
- There was a suggestion made to use only 6 inch net openings targeting chums. This suggestion was discussed by all. There was feedback provided by a few lower river subsistence and commercial fishers that the 6 inch netting may increase the rate of king dropout and mortality. There was also testimony given that the impact of this mortality may not be as great as it may appear to the fishers.
- Caution must be used when making the decision to open the season on the 15<sup>th</sup>, but when managing the river it is in the best economic interest of everyone to consider the needs of both the subsistence and commercial fishery. One participant stated in his opinion, the one or two hundred kings that may be harvested on the 15<sup>th</sup> opening would not significantly impact the subsistence fishery; especially since traditionally up to 80% of these first run fish are males and it would be better to harvest these then spawning females later in the season. (There was some disagreement expressed by some subsistence fishers following this statement and concern that the run was not yet strong enough. There was also support for this statement stated by subsistence fishermen).
- One lower river fishermen utilized his traditional knowledge of fish arrival related to ice movement off the coast saying that everything is late including the herring. The salmon wait out at the mouth of the river until the ice disappears and the water gets warmer; nature is taking its course and we do not need to worry about the fish coming into the river.

Fisheries managers agreed to take the feedback and carefully weigh their policy decision-making based upon the views expressed, escapement goals, and the needs of all.

**Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference  
Call #4– June 20, 2006**

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Mayo, Old Crow, Eagle, Circle, Beaver, Rampart, Tanana, Minto, Galena, Koyukuk, Huslia, Allakaket, Nulato, Kaltag, Grayling, Anvik, Holy Cross, Marshall, St. Mary’s, Mt. Village, Emmonak, Hooper Bay.

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG, Commercial Fisheries Division
USFWS - Emmonak and Fairbanks
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage and Fairbanks
AVCP –
Selkirk Renewable Resource Council, Canada
Boreal Fisheries; B.B. Kings; Interior Alaska Fish Processors
TCC –

**Subsistence Reports:**

Up-river communities report that the water levels have crested and there is a lot of debris with the exception of Old Crow which had little to no debris. Many of these communities are still preparing for fishing. The rapids reported that they have caught their first king on June 18<sup>th</sup>. The water temperatures near Rampart are average compared with previous data and there are a few large trees in the river. The fishwheel video project near the Rapids is recording a good pulse of bering cisco moving into the upper-river. In Tanana they are still waiting for fish. Galena reported kings caught on June 19<sup>th</sup> and no debris. Koyukuk reported that the first chums appeared on the 16<sup>th</sup> and the first king was caught on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Huslia has not yet caught any chums but is catching sheefish, pike and whitefish. Allakaket reported high water and no salmon. Nulato and Kaltag are reporting small numbers of kings and the drift and seine nets are not out yet. Anvik has reported catching chum by two fishermen using set nets. Shageluk expressed concerns about fishing schedule timing due to late run timing of fish. Marshall and Pilot station reported many people out at fish camps and starting to catch fish. There was no debris reported and water levels are down. In St. Mary’s subsistence activity has increased and many people are nearing their subsistence quotas. In Mt. Village 60-70% of peoples needs have been met and there was a pulse of kings reported passing over the weekend. In Alakanuk subsistence needs are being met although they are still in the process of fishing. Hooper Bay reported a hit of kings at the beginning of the weekend. 70-75% of subsistence fishers have met their needs in Hooper Bay.

## **Management updates:**

All indicators suggest later run timing for Chinook salmon this year. Based on late ice breakup timing and current test fish catches and sonar passage estimates, the 2006 Chinook salmon run timing is similar to 1984 when commercial fishing did not start until June 18. Test fish catches in 1984 began increasing from June 13-16. The Department's test nets observed the first pulse of Chinook salmon from June 15 through June 18 this year. The first quarter point was on June 18 in 1984 when commercial fishing started. In 2006 we are projecting the first quarter point will be around June 19 at the lower river test fishery.

The Pilot Station sonar project provides an index of Chinook salmon abundance. The cumulative passage estimate of 32,253 Chinook salmon through June 22 is below the average through this date of 80,515 fish. June 18 is the average first quarter point of the run indexed at the sonar. The projected first quarter point is around June 22 this year.

Additionally, the Pilot Station sonar provides an estimate of summer chum salmon abundance. The current passage estimate of 1,326,003 summer chum salmon is more than twice the historical average of 434,628.

At this time the 2005 Chinook salmon run appears to be below average and similar to 2005, but later in run timing. Based on later run timing, the Chinook salmon run is projected to be near 125,000 above Pilot Station sonar. Based on average run timing; the summer chum run is projected to be near 5.7 million fish above Pilot Station Sonar.

The commercial salmon season was opened on June 15 in District Y-2 for a short conservative opening (shortest ever) that was designed to keep the catch low. The run is later than average and different from what we planned preseason based on average run timing. However, flexibility in management is important. They based the opening on the projection of a surplus of Chinook salmon this year, a low catch because of low abundance in District 2 and the likelihood of a high percentage of males at this time in the run.

## **Discussion:**

Q: Is there a year that correlates with this years large number of chums?

A: In 1995 there were 3.5 million chum.

Q: What is a Jack?

A: A juvenile non-breeding male.

Q: What is the relationship between Bering Sea salmon bycatch and returns to the Yukon River?

A: The answer to this question comes from a YRDFFA Biologist. There is not enough data at this time to make a direct correlation. Caution should be used when evaluating these relationships because open water salmon move between different regions and have shifting distribution patterns. The current savings areas may or may not be in locations that avoid the salmon distribution therefor boats trying to avoid salmon may or may not be fishing in salmon dense areas.

There was a request to have the counts made placed in an excel format.

There was a request to have the subsistence season extended due to late run-timing. This alternative was still being evaluated for its effectiveness.

There was a request to have the commercial fishing hours faxed to the Tanana Chiefs Council.

There was a request to have sex ratios included in the Fish and Game teleconference report.

There was a comment from subsistence fishermen that processors should not commit an amount and specific date that salmon will be delivered. The processors explained the difficulty of maintaining markets without giving dates and that consumers request that information. The processors went on to say that the wild salmon market is competing with the farmed fish market and the farm fish markets are consistent with delivery dates and quality.

A community member complained that he was not receiving real-time fish counts. Fish and Game explained that the counts rely to a certain degree on modeling programs that integrate data (including fish numbers from previous days and upcoming days); therefore, they are unable to provide real-time data at this point.

The processors and Fish and Game explained that plane schedules are one factor that they must consider for a commercial opening. As a result, openings in St. Mary's may not occur at the times of the largest run.



**Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference  
Call #5– June 27, 2006**

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Hooper Bay, Emmonak, St. Mary’s, Pilot Station, Anvik, Grayling, Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, Galena, Tanana, Rampart, Rapids, Ft. Yukon, Circle, Eagle, Whitehorse, Pelly, Mayo, Dawson, Old Crow.

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Pilot Station,
USFWS - Emmonak and Fairbanks
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage
DFO - Canada
Selkirk Renewable Resource Council, Canada
Interior Alaska Fish Processors
CATG, AVCP

**Subsistence Reports:**

Lower-river communities are either done or nearing the subsistence catches needs. Hooper Bay reported a pulse of pinks. A community member in Emmonak reported that southerly winds are strong, water is cooler, and water is high. According to him traditionally these are good indicators of strong salmon runs and increasing abundance. Up to Pilot Station reported little to no debris. Pilot Station reported high debris and they have about 60% of their subsistence needs. Anvik reported starting their subsistence harvesting, rising waters and high debris loads. Grayling also reported high water and increasing debris loads. Kaltag, Nulato, and Koyukuk had just started subsistence fishing, and also have high water and debris. In Huslia fishing has started, but is poor and water levels were dropping. Galena also reported poor fishing, rising water and debris. Tanana reported increasing water levels and that the test wheel and subsistence wheels are working but there are few fish at this time. Rampart reports that water is too high for fishing. The Canadian and border communities report high water and no salmon fishing effort at this time. The Selkirk Renewable Resource Council reported fires in the Selkirk/Pelly Farm area threatening homes.

**Management updates:**

ADFG:

Lower river subsistence fishers report that their needs are being met on both king and chum salmon. The opportunity to harvest subsistence king salmon in the upper river will be available as the first pulse and second pulses detected in the test fishery moves upriver.

### *Assessment Projects*

Lower River test set net project/ADFG, YR DFA: The cumulative CPUE through June 26 for king salmon is 14.79. The cumulative CPUE is below the 1989-2005 average of 18.25 for this date. In 2006, the projected first quarter point for king salmon will be around June 21, which is 6 days later than average.

Lower Yukon River Cooperative drift test fishing project/YDFDA, ADFG: The cooperative drift net test fishery has a cumulative index of 284.91 for king salmon through June 25. The 2001-2003, 05 average cumulative index through June 25 is 420.63. The cumulative index through June 25 for summer chum salmon is 5,152.90. The 2001-2003, 05 average cumulative index through June 25 is 1,320.38.

Pilot Station sonar project/ADFG, YDFDA, YR DFA: The preliminary Pilot Station sonar passage estimate through June 25 is 56,385 kings and 1,791,629 summer chum salmon. The current king salmon passage estimate is below the average of 103,646 kings at this time. The current chum salmon passage estimate is nearly three times the average of 642,010.

East Fork Andreafsky Wier: The base rail and bulkhead were installed on June 25, and the crew will begin installing the panels on June 26. The crew anticipates the weir should be fish tight by Wednesday, June 27.

### *Age Composition*

Age composition for king salmon from the test fish set net project shows the 5 year-olds at 53% and 6 year-olds at 42%. The sample size is 515 fish. The percent females are 40%. There has been an increase in the percentage of 6 year-old fish and a higher proportion of females.

Age composition for chum salmon from the drift test net project shows the 4 year-olds at 19% and 5 year-olds at 80%. The percent females are 58%. The sample size is 181 fish.

The age composition for king salmon from the second District Y-2 commercial harvests shows about 54% age 5, and 43% age 6. Percent female is estimated to be at least 37%.

### *Assessment*

All indicators suggest a run 5-6 days later than average for king salmon this year. The Department's test nets observed the first pulse of king salmon from June 15 through June 18. The Department observed a second, larger pulse from June 22 through June 26; this pulse appears to be one of the largest on record as a CPUE greater than 2.0 was observed on three consecutive days. Through June 25, the cumulative CPUE is 13.4.

In 2006 we are projecting the first quarter point will fall around June 21 at the lower river test fishery with a CPUE of 6.28. The average quarter point from 1989-2005 for king salmon at the Lower River test set nets is June 15 with an average cumulative CPUE of 7.82. The Pilot Station sonar project provides an index of king salmon abundance. The cumulative passage estimate of 56,185 kings through June 25 is below the average through this date of 103,646. However, the numbers are expected to increase sharply over the next few days as the large second pulse of king salmon reaches Pilot Station. June 18 is the

average first quarter point of the run indexed at the sonar. The projected first quarter point is around June 24 this year.

Additionally, the Pilot Station sonar provides an estimate of summer chum salmon abundance. The current passage estimate of 1,791,629 summer chum salmon is nearly three times the historical average of 642,010.

In summary, at this time the 2006 king salmon run appears to be below average and similar to 2005, but later in run timing. Based on later run timing, the king salmon run is projected to be 165,000 or greater above Pilot Station sonar. Based on average run timing, the summer chum run is projected to be greater than 4 million fish above Pilot Station Sonar.

**Discussion:**

Q: Does the % of females increase as the run progresses?

A: Typically yes; however there are no absolutes.

Q: What are the #'s from the Andreafsky weir?

A: The weir is not operational and should be running on June 28.

Q: How accurate is the sonar at this time?

A: With the current water levels and debris the sonar is working well at this time.

There was some dissatisfaction expressed by an upriver community member about the commercial opening prior to upriver community subsistence needs being met. ADFG reiterated that the openings came at the tail end of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> king pulses and therefore that fish should be arriving in Koyukuk around July 2<sup>nd</sup>. The runs are later this year than in recent years. In addition he pointed out that in 1995 during similar runs, all escapement, commercial and subsistence goals were met. An Emmonak community member added that the commercial openings are being very conservative to meet the needs of the up-river communities and the lower river would like to harvest more but were unable to.

ADFG requested that districts 4A and B keep them informed about high water and debris loads.

Reminder: The dorsal fin only needs to be cut for subsistence fish in Y1, Y2 and Y3.

**Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference  
Call #6– July 4, 2006**

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Mayo, Old Crow, Beaver, Ruby, Galena, Koyukuk, Huslia, Nulato, Kaltag, St. Mary’s, Emmonak, Alakanuk, and Hooper Bay.

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Fairbanks
USFWS - Emmonak, Fairbanks, Galena
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage
DFO - Canada

**Subsistence Reports:**

The Canadian communities report high water and no salmon at this time. Beaver has high water levels and a few salmon have been seen. Rampart and the rapids are actively cutting king for subsistence. There are five wheels in the Rampart region and about twelve nets at present. There, the water is high and starting to recede. The water temperature for the region is slightly cooler than 2003 to 2005 data. The wheel in Ruby reported 126 chinook and 81 chums caught. Galena has high winds and increasing water levels, and Koyukuk reported 100 kings caught over the week with poor fishing due to high water and rough weather. Nulato also expressed concerns about high water and rough weather and that they are not currently meeting their subsistence needs. Further down-river, Holy Cross has completed their subsistence fishing reporting strong runs that included several large fish and little evidence of disease. St. Mary’s is nearing their subsistence requirements and many people are currently smoking fish, while the river begins to rise again. Emmonak also reports nearing their subsistence requirements, little debris in the river, and a pulse of pinks on Saturday. An elder in St. Mary’s expressed concerns from his peers that this summer is unusual in the large number of chums returning before the king runs and the early run of pinks.

**Management updates:**

**Department of Fisheries and Oceans - Canada**

Chinook have not been reported in Canada yet. The test wheel in xxxx has not caught any kings yet. Canada is expecting fish to arrive between July 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> with a limited commercial opening following the first arrivals at the border. There may be some delay if high water delays the run.

## **USFWS- Office of Subsistence Management:**

The first fish are expected to be nearing Circle and Eagle. The first pulse is thought to be near Huslia and in the rapids, the second near Koyukuk, and the third between Russian Mission and Holy Cross.

### **ADFG:**

#### *Assessment Projects*

##### Lower River test set net project/ADFG, YR DFA

The cumulative CPUE through July 3 for king salmon is 20.12. The cumulative CPUE is near the 1989-2005 average of 21.98 for this date. In 2006, the projected first quarter point for king salmon was around June 21, which is 6 days later than average.

##### Lower Yukon River Cooperative drift test fishing project/YDFDA, ADFG

The cooperative drift net test fishery has a cumulative index of 366.07 for king salmon through July 3. The 2001-2003, 05 average cumulative index through July 3 is 512.90. The cumulative index through July 3 for summer chum salmon is 6,347.58. The 2001-2003, 05 average cumulative index through July 3 is 2,007.14.

##### Pilot Station sonar project/ADFG, YDFDA, YR DFA

The preliminary Pilot Station sonar passage estimate through July 2nd is 139,951 kings and 3,017,335 summer chum salmon. The current king salmon passage estimate is near the average of 136,951 kings for this date. The current chum salmon passage estimate is nearly three times the average of 1,080,284.

##### Marshall Drift project/AVCP

The Marshall drift net test fishery has a cumulative index of 500.61 for king salmon through July 2. The 1999-2000, 05 average cumulative index through July 2 is 935.91.

##### E. Fork Andreafsky River Weir:

The weir became operational on June 28. The cumulative fish passage through July 2 is 110 kings and 30,835 summer chum salmon. The 1995-2005 W/O 2001 average cumulative passage through July 2 is 542 kings and 20,794 summer chum salmon.

#### *Age Composition*

A combined maximum of 60 kings and 80 chums per day are sampled in our test fish projects at Big Eddy and Middle Mouth for age, sex, length, weight and girth. The average age composition for king salmon from the test fish set net project indicates the 5 year-olds at 52% and 6 year-olds at 43%. The sample size is 798 fish. The percent females are 44%. Recently there has been an increase in the percentage of 6 year-old fish and a higher proportion of females.

The average age composition for chum salmon from the Big Eddy drift test net project shows the 4 year-olds at 24% and 5 year-olds at 76%. The percent females are 56%. The sample size is 585 fish.

The department samples a maximum of 400 Chinook salmon from each commercial opening in the lower river for age, sex, length, and genetics. The age composition for king salmon from the

third District Y-1 commercial harvest on June 30 shows about 48% age 5, and 50% age 6. Percent female is estimated to be 54%. The age composition from the most recent Y-1 and Y-2 openings is still pending, however, staff observed that the kings still appear bright with less than 15% blushed.

#### *Assessment*

All indicators suggest a run 5-6 days later than average for king salmon this year. The department's test nets observed the first pulse of king salmon from June 15 through June 18. The department observed a second, larger pulse from June 22 through June 26; this pulse appears to be one of the largest on record as a CPUE greater than 2.0 was observed on three consecutive days. A third pulse was detected on 28-Jun with a daily CPUE topping out at 1.21. Through July 3rd, the cumulative CPUE is 20.12 which is slightly less than 2 points below average.

In 2006 we are projecting the first quarter point is around June 21 at the lower river test fishery with a CPUE of 6.28. The average quarter point from 1989-2005 for king salmon at the Lower River test set nets is June 15 with an average cumulative CPUE of 7.82. The Pilot Station sonar projects cumulative passage estimate of approximately 140,000 kings through July 2nd is above the average through this date of 136,199. June 18 is the average first quarter point of the run indexed at the sonar. The projected first quarter point at Pilot Station is around June 24 this year.

Additionally, the Pilot Station sonar's current passage estimate of 3,017,335 summer chum salmon is nearly three times the historical average of 1,080,284.

There is a surplus of summer chum salmon available for commercial harvest, but there appears to be very little market for them.

In summary, at this time the 2006 king salmon run appears to be nearing average. Based on later run timing, the king salmon run is projected to be 165,000 or greater above Pilot Station sonar. Based on average run timing, the summer chum run is projected to be greater than 4 million fish above Pilot Station Sonar.

#### **Discussion:**

ADFG predicts that migrating fish average about thirty five miles per day.

There was a request made by a Y-4A fishermen to extend the drift net fishery for subsistence to past July 14<sup>th</sup> due to impacts from fishermen in Galena coming down to fish near Koyukuk. A Galena representative stated that due to poor weather and high gas prices there is little fishing effort there even though there are some boats down by Koyukuk when the weather permits. The USFWS representative and the ADFG representative stated that they will do a seven day per week and see if that works before extending the drift area past July 14<sup>th</sup>.

The YRDF Executive Director asked if the runs were still compact and close together as they were predicted they would be earlier this year. ADFG stated that it did appear the runs are similar to this prediction.

**Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference  
Call #7– July 11, 2006**

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Mayo, Old Crow, Beaver, Ruby, Galena, Koyukuk, Huslia, Nulato, Kaltag, St. Mary’s, Emmonak, Alakanuk, and Hooper Bay.

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Pilot Station
USFWS - Emmonak, Fairbanks
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage. Fairbanks
DFO - Canada
Interior Fish Processors
Tanana Chiefs Council

**Subsistence Reports:**

Lower river communities reported a decline in fishing effort. Alakanuk reported that the kings coming in were still bright and healthy in appearance. Emmonak has 75% to 100% of their subsistence Chinook caught and 75% to 90% of their chum subsistence needs met. There is still some subsistence fishing occurring but many people are waiting for the fall chums. St. Mary’s reported some effort for Chinook, a recent run of primarily whitenose Chinook, and receding water. Holy Cross has pretty much finished and there were seven red salmon caught there last week. Grayling reported that they are caught up on their immediate subsistence catches and are continuing to fish to meet their annual needs. The water in Kaltag is still high, but families are reporting good catches of “good” size fish, and little debris. The third pulse of Chinook arrived in Kaltag on July 9 – a day earlier than expected. High water and high debris is the cause of poor Chinook fishing in Huslia; however, chum fishing has been good there. Galena reports good seine fishing and one wheel up and running. The Rapids reports: *“Catches during the first pulse that has past Rapids was very high for all fishers. Rapids fishers are actively cutting king for subsistence. There are 5 wheels and about 14 nets at present. Presently the second pulse is just starting to build. Water is slightly high and somewhat steady. Water temp is 61.5 degrees or slightly cool compared with 2003 to 2005 temperature data. Rapids fish wheel video project has a cumulative CPUE of 2099 Chinook which is good for this stage of the run. YRDFA student data collection project has sampled about 500 Chinook so far for length, weight, girth, sex, and lots more. ICH is starting to show up regularly in fishers catches but at a normal rate for the rapids.”* The representative from Rampart stated that the water is receding and the debris is high with people fishing where they are able to successfully. There are a few fishers in Rampart who are done fishing, but many just started. In Eagle the water temperature is 62 F, there has been no debris (but small amounts are starting to appear), and water levels have been decreasing since June 27. Fishing in Eagle has resulted in one to two fish caught per day. Whitehorse is not presently fishing and water is high. Old Crow reported high water and a lot of silt. The salmon are

starting to arrive in Old Crow, but due to high water it is difficult to fish, with one to two medium sized salmon caught per day, which appear to be in good health.

### **Management updates:**

#### **Department of Fisheries and Oceans - Canada**

The first Chinook was caught in Canada on July 4. Initially, there were low numbers but they appear to be increasing with twenty tagged. At present the Canadian return is below the historical 10 year average even when adjustments are made for late run timing. This is similar to the 2001 run, but this year's numbers to date are slightly lower than 2001's. DFO is planning a commercial opening starting July 14 at noon. On this date they expect the earliest fish to begin showing in small numbers near Pelly.

#### **USFWS:**

The run timing appears to be just a little faster than the 35 miles per day that is used for predicting where the pulse currently is in the river system. The run is actually averaging about 37 miles per day. Based upon this data, USFWS predicts that pulse #1 is at or nearing Beaver and Fort Yukon, pulse #2 is around Tanana, and pulse #3 is near Galena on July 11. This timing correlates closely with subsistence reports given during the teleconference.

#### **Alaska Department of Fish & Game:**

Salmon are expected near the border between July 14 and 18. The 3<sup>rd</sup> pulse arrived one day early in Kaltag and the pulse sheet will be updated accordingly. To date the subsistence fishery in Alaska is fairing well according to various reports given to ADF&G. There will be no additional Y1 through Y3 commercial openings. Y5B and Y5C, and Y6 have commercial periods announced.

#### **Assessment Projects**

##### Lower River test set net project/ADFG, YR DFA

The cumulative CPUE through July 9 for king salmon is 21.27. The 1989-2005 average CPUE for this date is 23.49. In 2006, the projected first quarter point for king salmon was around June 21, which is 6 days later than average.

##### Lower Yukon River Cooperative drift test fishing project/YDFDA, ADFG

The cooperative drift net test fishery has a cumulative index of 374.32 for king salmon through July 9. The 2001-2003, 05 average cumulative index through July 9 is 529.04. The cumulative index through July 9 for summer chum salmon is 6,533.03. The 2001-2003, 05 average cumulative index through July 9 is 2,185.08.

##### Pilot Station sonar project/ADFG, YDFDA, YR DFA

The preliminary Pilot Station sonar passage estimate through July 9 is 156,036 kings and 3,495,201 summer chum salmon. The current king salmon passage estimate is near the average of 154,905 kings for this date. The current chum salmon passage estimate is nearly three times the average of 1,378,442.

##### Marshall Drift project/AVCP

The Marshall drift net test fishery has a cumulative index of 615.61 for king salmon through July 9. The 1999-2000, 05 average cumulative index through July 9 is 999.75.

##### E. Fork Andreafsky River Weir:

The cumulative fish passage through July 9 is 2,054 kings and 79,815 summer chum salmon. The 1995-2005 (without 2001) average cumulative passage through July 9 is 2,066 kings and 42,997 summer chum



salmon. The cumulative summer chum passage is within the escapement goal of 65,000 to 130,000 for the East Fork Andreafsky River.

#### Anvik River Sonar:

The cumulative fish passage through July 9 is 408,574 summer chum salmon. Summer chum salmon passage is within the escapement goal range of 350,000 to 700,000 fish for the Anvik River. The weirs have been flooded and the high water has affected the sonar counts. The 1987-2005 average cumulative passage through July 9 is 380,684 summer chum salmon.

#### Gisasa River Weir:

The cumulative fish passage through July 9 is 565 kings and 124,388 summer chum salmon. From June 30 through July 2 the weir was flooded and no counts are available for these dates. The 1995-2005 average cumulative passage through July 9 is 539 kings and 29,528 summer chum salmon.

#### Henshaw Creek Weir:

The cumulative fish passage through June 30 is 0 kings and 4 summer chum salmon. Since June 30 the weir has been flooded and no counts are available since that time.

#### Tozitna River Weir:

From June 30 through July 3 the weir was flooded and no counts are available for these dates. The weir resumed operations on July 4, but has reported counting difficulties on July 8 and 9 due to high water. The cumulative passage to date is 12 kings and 328 summer chum salmon.

#### *Age Composition*

The average age composition for king salmon from the test fish set net project indicates the 5 year-olds at 51% and 6 year-olds at 48%. The sample size is 951 fish. The percent females are 44%. Recently there has been an increase in the percentage of 6 year-old fish and a higher proportion of females.

The average age composition for chum salmon from the Big Eddy drift test net project shows the 4 year-olds at 27% and 5 year-olds at 72%. The percent females are 59%. The sample size is 847 fish.

The age composition for king salmon from the fifth District Y-1 commercial harvest on July 6 shows about 43% age 5, and 53% age 6. Percent female is estimated to be 51%. The age composition for summer chum salmon was 30% 4 year-olds and 69% 5 year-olds with 50% female.

#### *Assessment*

All indicators suggest a run 5-6 days later than average for king salmon this year. The Department's test nets observed the first pulse of king salmon from June 15 through June 18. The Department observed a second, larger pulse from June 22 through June 26; this pulse appears to be one of the largest on record as a CPUE greater than 2.0 was observed on three consecutive days. A third pulse was detected on 28-Jun with a daily CPUE topping out at 1.21. Through July 9th, the cumulative CPUE is 21.27 which is slightly less than 2 points below average for this date. Catches from the lower river test fishery have been low over the last week with a daily CPUE dropping as low as 0.14.

In 2006 we are projecting the first quarter point was around June 21 at the lower river test fishery with a CPUE of 6.28. The average quarter point from 1989-2005 for king salmon at the Lower River test set nets is June 15 with an average cumulative CPUE of 7.82. The Pilot Station sonar projects cumulative passage estimate of approximately 156,000 kings through July 9 is slightly greater than the average through this date of 154,500. King counts have been tapering off over the past 4 days at Pilot Station. June 18 is the average first quarter point of the run indexed at the sonar. The projected first quarter point at Pilot Station is around June 24 this year.

The Pilot Station sonar's current passage estimate of 3,495,000 summer chum salmon is nearly three times the historical average of 1,378,000. Additionally, all escapement monitoring projects have observed summer chum salmon numbers equal to or above the historical averages through July 9.

In summary, at this time the 2006 king salmon run appears to be nearing average. Based on later run timing, the king salmon run is projected to be approximately 165,000 above Pilot Station sonar. Based on average run timing, the summer chum run is projected to be near 4 million fish above Pilot Station Sonar. The run is tapering off in the lower river. The large 2nd pulse of kings is predicted to be passing through Y-4 and approaching Y-5 at this time.

### *Fall Fishing Report*

On July 16 the lower river will switch to a fall fishing management strategy. ADFG is expecting 1.2 million fall chums with enough fish to fulfill escapement, subsistence, and commercial needs. There are no expected schedule changes for next week (July 16-22) at this time.

### **Discussion:**

Q: Are the fish migrating upstream at a faster rate than expected due to high water?

A: ADFG responded that it may be due to high water. It also may be due to fish making up time so that they arrive at the spawning grounds around the right time. It may also be a combination of these factors.

Q: Are the test-nets in Emmonak still catching fish?

A: ADFG responded that the catches have been slow with a total of 10 caught on July 11, and 6 caught on July 9. There is no expectation that this will pick up by the end of the season.

Q: How long will the pulse last in Galena?

A: Maybe two days with one day probably stronger than the other. The fish do tend to spread out more as they travel upstream.

Q: Do you have a prediction on silvers?

A: The silver run is expected to be strong with average to above average returns.

Q: How successful is fishing in the Koyukuk?

A: Six people have been catching fish but it took a lot of effort. It was about 1 fish per drift, but it seemed to pick up on Friday.

Pilot Station fishermen reported that tapeworms are showing in some of the salmon and that in some cases there was puss-like liquid and soft meat. Kaltag also reported some puss in Chinook caught mostly in the center of the channel or near sandbars where they did not traditionally fish.

There was a second-hand report from St. Mary's that the north mouth of the river has been bringing in quite a few kings.

Grayling requested an extension of drift net subsistence fishing for Chinook because many people have not yet met their subsistence needs. ADFG did not anticipate any problems with extending the fishery and agreed to put out an announcement later in the day.

Huslia reported that salmon were caught that looked similar to silver. ADFG responded that these are probably some bright, early fall chums that are coming in with the summer chums.

## Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference Call #8– July 18, 2006

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Mayo, Old Crow, Beaver, Ruby, Galena, Koyukuk, Huslia, Nulato, Kaltag, St. Mary's, Emmonak, Alakanuk, and Hooper Bay.

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Anchorage, Fairbanks
USFWS - Anchorage, Fairbanks, Emmonak, Galena
USFWS, OSM –
DFO - Canada
CATG
Tanana Chiefs Council

### Subsistence Reports:

The Canadians are waiting for their first strong pulse. Teslin reported no salmon, water gradually receding and nice weather. Further downstream in Pelly there are few fish at this time as well. Dawson, however, did start fishing over the past week, but the salmon #'s were low. There, 33 fish were caught over five days giving an average of 1.6 fish caught per day per net (four nets). The water level in Dawson is dropping and there is little debris. North, in the community of Old Crow, the water has dropped and there are a few small salmon, but not in large numbers.

On the other side of the border in Eagle, Alaska, there are nets in the river and one wheel running with 16 salmon caught in one day. Fort Yukon is actively fishing and some residents have met 50% of their subsistence requirements with two fishermen meeting 100% of their requirements. The fish there are medium to small in size, but they are healthy in appearance. The foul weather is making it difficult to fish in Fort Yukon as well as in Beaver where the high water and high gas prices are discouraging. They were still assessing catch numbers in these two communities. Rampart reported improving weather conditions and good fishing; while the Rapids reports:

“-Catches during the second pulse, that has probably past Rapids, was very low for all fishers considering the size of the pulse at the mouth. Rapids fishers are actively cutting king for subsistence. There are 5 wheels and very few nets at present because of chum getting in them. Presently no sign of 3rd pulse yet.

-Water is slightly high and somewhat steady. Water temp is running slightly cool compared with 2003 to 2005 temperature data.

-Rapids fish wheel video project has a cumulative CPUE of 2566 Chinook which is good for this stage of the run but is made up of 71% early 1st pulse fish and only 29% second pulse king.

-YRDFA student data collection project has sampled about 700 Chinook so far for length, weight, girth, sex, and lots more.

-ICH is continuing to increase regularly in fishers catches but at a normal rate for approaching the last weeks of king season.”

Fishing in Nenana has also commenced. 74 small kings and 750 chums were caught by one group. In all 1,700 kings were sampled having an average weight of 13 lbs; and four fish of 30 lbs or more. Two representatives from Galena shared information. A flight over District 4-A and B did not see any nets out. The other representative reported two families have finished fishing and the river receding considerably with no debris.

A representative from Koyukuk explained that there are conflicting reports from fishermen about the occurrence of fish locally. He reported a good run of bright kings since Friday and that many people have stopped fishing due to difficulties associated with high water and some debris. Many residents appear to only have about 35% of their subsistence catch in this community. Fishermen in Huslia are also battling high water and debris with one family reporting 50% complete. The troubles from the Koyukuk River region also include disappearing eddies, erosion, and lost nets. In addition, wet weather is discouraging the cutting and drying of fish (high probability of spoilage).

Huslia did report many chums; as did Allakaket where the river was rising and lots of debris. Allakaket also reported a few kings and wanted to thank fishermen from Galena for sending up some fish.

Nulato and Kaltag are also being affected by weather. Last week there was a good run of bluebacks prior to the foul weather. Fishermen in Nulato will start again this evening. In Kaltag there are no kings being caught at this time. Kings caught in the middle of the run had nice meat and towards the end of the run it was bitter and more solid. The representative thought this may be related to where the fish are being caught in the river (middle channel).

Grayling is doing ok. They did not get a full quota due to timing and the windows opening according to the representative. They are at about 75%. Holy Cross has also stopped fishing due to lack of fish and they are waiting on silvers.

Further downstream in Pilot Station and St. Mary's many fishermen are done or are waiting for fall and better weather. The kings and summer chums have petered out. Emmonak is also mostly done with Chinook and chum with some fishers waiting for the fall chum run. They reported unusually cold weather for June and early July.

### **Management updates:**

#### **USFWS:**

USFWS reported that the 1<sup>st</sup> fish should have arrived in Whitehorse with the 1<sup>st</sup> pulse around Eagle and the border crossing. From the subsistence reports the second pulse does not appear to have maintained the strength expected and should be near Beaver and Fort Yukon. They do not expect the 2<sup>nd</sup> pulse to show in significant mass upstream. The 3<sup>rd</sup> pulse should be near Rampart and the bridge.

#### **Department of Fisheries and Oceans - Canada**

The first Yukon River commercial salmon fishery opening in Canada ran between July 14 and July 17. There were reported low catches overall, and the fishermen near the border had the most success. 18.4% of the initial run appears to be female with that number increasing as the runs progress. 880 fish are predicted to have crossed the border to date with a total border escapement predicted to be 4400. Some fish have been reported at Tatchun Creek although Pelly is reporting very few fish. There is some concern about the timing and the reduced size of the second pulse. There has also been a request by the Yukon Salmon Committee to liberalize the recreational catch limits (increase by two to four Chinook). DFO is currently considering the request while weighing: the smaller than expected mid-river 2<sup>nd</sup> pulse, the high CPUE reported at the rapids, and current US and Canadian escapement objectives.

**Alaska Department of Fish & Game:** *Cut and paste the following link into your address bar for ADFG's Update # 7, Yukon Area Summer Salmon Fishery*

<http://csfish.adfg.state.ak.us/newsrelease/view.php?year=2006&dist=YUS&species=400&num=39>

## **ADFG Fall Season Outlook:**

Test fishing for fall chum started Sunday, July 16. They are using 5.5 inch to 6 inch gear. Sunday saw an increased number of fish from the day before, but Monday was low again. The fishery is still variable with early fall and late spring and summer run fish mixed during this transitory period. The lower River is now operating under fall management with an estimated 1.2 million chum run. The subsistence schedule remains the same as the summer schedule in Y1, Y2 and Y3. The commercial opening will be dependent upon the stock composition in the river.

## **Discussion:**

Comment: The peak of the pulses this year is very compressed. If high water and bad weather prevents you from missing the peak, you are less likely to have success.

Q: Are the conservation measures enforced by Canada as strict as US measures?

A: Yes, they are. However, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada prefers to use data collected from fishermen during limited commercial fisheries openings to model run size, as opposed to run their own test fishery. A representative from Teslin added (paraphrased) "...in our community our elders made the decision to not fish two days a week, regardless the run size, to promote healthier stocks."

Comment: An elder from my community (Emmonak) thinks that the run timing this year is closer to what it used to be and this timing is not that unusual. Perhaps the runs are shifting back to the old ways.

Comment: T.T.C. – Teslin – the community has no fishing permits yet.

Response: The permits are in process.

Q: *Rampart* Why was I not informed about the recent commercial opening?

A: *ADFG* This opening was a last minute decision. There was only five hours from the time the decision was made to inform everyone about the opening. The news release was announced July 14, 2006 on local radio stations. A news release was sent by fax transmittal to select area villages, processors, buyers, and fishermen on July 14. Additionally select processors, buyers and fishermen were notified by telephone or in person on July 14.

Q: *Rampart* Why were people fishing after the 12 hour commercial opening closed?

A: *Interior Fish Processors* At 9:30 am on Saturday the fish was loaded onto a boat and sent to Fairbanks and did not return to Rampart. As far as they know, there was no one fishing after 6 am.

*ADFG* will look into it.

Q: What are the most recent counts from the border sonar project?

A: As of July 16 – 4,900 kings. The first pulse should be going through as we speak.

Q: Is the new sonar (DIDSON) counting kings as part of the 165,000.

A: Yes, the DIDSON counts are included and account for about 30% of the 165,000.

Comment: The test fishing in Pilot will continue through August with the 7.5 inch mesh, but they will be using one less net.

Q: Will Whitehorse have a recreational fishery? The first nation needs have not been met.

A: Yes, but there has been no decision made to increase the catch limits. (See DFO report summary above)

Comment/Request: There was a request made by a St. Mary's resident to limit non-Yukon resident subsistence fishers to 250 lbs. The representative stated that there is a great deal of suspicion surrounding the legal subsistence destination vs. illegal commercial distribution of this fish and possible loopholes in current regulations.

Request: Huslia is in need of a walk in freezer. Please forward any relevant grant links or available related resources to Jack Wholecheese.

## Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference Call #9– July 25, 2006

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Emmonak, Mt. Village, St. Mary’s, Pilot Station, Grayling, Kaltag, Koyukuk, Huslia, Hughes, Galena, Minto, Fairbanks, Tanana, Rapids, Rampart, Beaver, Eagle, Pelly, Dawson, Teslin.

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Pilot Station
USFWS - Fairbanks
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage, Bethel
DFO - Canada
National Park Service

### Subsistence Reports:

Emmonak, Mt. Village, St. Mary’s, and Pilot Station all reported little to no fishing effort with many families waiting for the fall chum runs to fulfill subsistence needs. St. Mary’s did report some humpy’s, a few cohos and a king going through. Grayling also reported a decrease in the fishing effort. There, the water is high and they are hoping for better opportunities with fall chum. Kaltag and Koyukuk reported dropping water and they are waiting for a run of silvers, whitefish and fall chum. In Huslia and Galena the debris loads and water was high last week and are starting to drop. The sheefish and whitefish are minimal and residents are waiting on silvers and fall chum. Minto and Fairbanks reported little fishing activity. In Fairbanks there are lots of chums, but the kings have passed. Tanana does not have many people fishing; most people are fishing up-river. The king run picked up on Sunday in Tanana. In Rampart the subsistence effort is predicted to run through this weekend with an expected 50% of the needs met. The Rampart fishers are looking to the fall chum run to fulfill the rest of their needs. The Rampart Rapids reports:

“King season is basically over in Rapids. The end came about a week early fishers felt. Talked to 8 camps that say they only got 1/3 to 1/2 the amount put up they normally do. Most describe reason being the poor start, early end and bulk of king hitting all at once in big first pulse. Water is still slightly high and very slowly dropping. Water temp has been rising lately with sunny days but has been generally colder this season. Rapids fish wheel video project has a cumulative CPUE of 2700 Chinook which is good compared to the past 2000 to 2005 projects. The 1st pulse made up 67% of project cumulative. Water height was above average all season which would normally tend to make fishwheel CPUE bias high, as unlike fall chum, king counts are not adjusted for water discharge. Separation of small and large king using video shows the largest percent of small king making up run since sizing started in 2002. YRDFA student data collection project has dissected 406 Chinook for Ichthyophonous disease and many more for length, weight, girth, sex, etc. The preliminary disease rate for the whole season is just under 10% which is

very low compared to similar 1999 to 2005 data which ranged from about 17% to 30%."

It was also reported that 18 miles above Rampart 16 out of 22 fishers have not met their subsistence needs. Eagle was having difficulty identifying any clear trends. Two wheel operators there have met their needs, but the net fishers are not doing as well - catching between 2 and 10 fish. Pelly reported a late and slow pickup in kings while Mayo has not had a fishery materialize yet. High water in Mayo is impeding their efforts. Dawson had their 2<sup>nd</sup> opening and little subsistence fishing. Finally, Teslin reported high water, rain and no fish; however fishing permits were being issued.

### **Management updates:**

#### **Department of Fisheries and Oceans - Canada**

##### Commercial Fisheries:

July 14-18, open for 4 days, 440 caught with average of 5 fishers participating  
14 tags- 32 fish/tag

July 21-24, open for 3 days, 530 caught with average of 5 fishers participating  
8 tags- 66 fish /tag

Fishers have reported that the fish size is below average which may to some extent relate to a higher proportion of 5 year old fish this year.

##### Recreational Fishery :

Have increased the daily and possession limits from 1/day 2 in possession to 2/day 4 in possession in the recreational fishery (sport fishery) based on a Yukon Salmon Committee recommendation; the average catch in this fishery was 229 for the 2001-2005 period.

##### Escapement Information:

Border escapement estimate to July 18<sup>th</sup> was 7,000 (95% CI 4,700 to 10,500).

Border escapement estimate to July 23<sup>rd</sup> using an average tag value was 14,000 (no CI available); this estimate should correspond to July 21/22 count at the Eagle sonar program.

-14 fish counted at the Big Salmon sonar Program which is consistent with late run timing.

- No fish to date at the Whitehorse Fishway- expect the first fish around August 01.

##### 2006 Timing Information:

With average timing approximately 43.7% of the total fish wheel catch occurs to July 23.

With 6 days late timing approximately 27.3% of the total fish wheel catch would occur to July 23.

Based on run timing that is 6 days late there will be sufficient numbers of fish for the spawning escapement goal of 28,000, First Nation needs and additional opportunities in the commercial, domestic and recreational fisheries. However there is still concern regarding the timing of the 2006 return and the strength of the latter part of the run.

**Alaska Department of Fish & Game:** *Cut and paste the following links into your address bar for ADFG's update.*

<http://csfish.adfg.state.ak.us/newsrelease/view.php?dist=YUS&year=2006&species=400&num=42>

##### **ADFG Fall Season Outlook:**

<http://csfish.adfg.state.ak.us/newsrelease/view.php?year=2006&dist=YUF&species=400&num=2>

**Dscussion:**

**Q:** When will the first fall chum start arriving?

**A: (ADFG)** The first chums arrived the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of July. The commercial harvest will start beginning to mid-August to prevent accidental harvest of late summer chums.

**Q: (Koyukuk)** Are the Pilot Station sonar counts accurate? They appear off to the subsistence fishers because we have not seen the return in the up-river communities we would expect from the sonar counts. Some fishers only have met 30% of their needs so far.

**A: (ADFG)** The counts are relatively accurate but there were some problems and the second pulse did not seem as large. You may not be catching as much because of high water, bad weather, and how condensed the first pulse was. The escapement goals are on track to being met or exceeded.

**Q:** What are the sonar counts at Eagle now? (Tuesday, July 25)

**A:** 29,000 kings. This is lower than last year but if the second pulse is good, escapement goals should be on track. We are seeing about 3,000 per day while last year we saw 5,000-6,000 per day.

**Q:** Is the test fishery in the lower river closed?

**A:** The drift nets are now fishing for the fall fishery with 6" mesh. The set nets ended on July 15.

**Q:** Are there any counts/fly-overs/test fisheries being conducted on any of the other tributaries in the lower river? Like the Chulinak River? Perhaps fish are using these more than we expect.

**A: (ADFG)** This tributary is not part of the current index used to estimate escapement. There are no counts that I know of, but I will investigate the question more and get back to you.

**Q:** What is the difference between the Canadian fishery designations and the US fishery designations?

**A: (DFO)** The Canadian fisheries are called the sport fishery, the domestic fishery, the commercial fishery and the aboriginal fishery. The aboriginal fishery involves FN fishers who fish for food, social or ceremonial purposes. . The domestic fishery is similar to the US subsistence fishery. Non-aboriginal people who reside or used to reside in remote locations are allowed for fish for their domestic use.

**Comment:** Below is some additional information provided by DFO in a follow-up phone conversation.

- Aboriginal Fishery – involves the First Nation fishers who fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes. The Aboriginal fishery is required to report all catch to DFO. Conservation takes priority over First Nation requirements.
- Domestic Fishery – non-natives that have licenses to fish in rural areas. There are seven domestic fishers that fish. The domestic fishery also reports all catch to DFO.
- Recreational/Sport Fishery – This fishery is similar to our sport fishery. The fishermen are licensed and required to report catches. There were approximately 1,000 salmon cards issued last year. The average Canadian recreational catch over last five years is 230 Chinook per year.
- Commercial – Twenty-one commercial license holders at this time. The average number of licensed fishers this year has been seven with a total catch so far at 1,181 (as of July 28).

**Q:** Are the Canadian or American fisheries managers branding salmon with a smiley face? We found two this year.

**A:** No, there is no management funded salmon smiley face branding projects.

**Request:** There was a request made by an Alaskan Native Representative that other Native community members review and support the resolution passed by the Yupiit of Andreafsky on climate change. If you have any questions call the Yupiit of Andreafsky (907) 438-2312.



**Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference  
Call #10 - August 1, 2006**

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Pelly, Mayo, Dawson, Beaver, Rampart, Tanana, Manley, Galena, Koyukuk, Allakaket, Kaltag, St. Mary’s, Emmonak

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Pilot Station
USFWS - Fairbanks, Galena
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage
DFO - Canada

**Subsistence Reports:**

Pelly reported that the catch this year is 513 below last years catch to date. The fish are averaging 20 pounds and people are still catching the 1<sup>st</sup> pulse fish. Mayo reported reasonable catches, while Dawson is not meeting their needs yet (but there are good #'s of fish). Beaver reported seven families drying fish and no fishing at this time. The poor weather in Beaver has prevented people from meeting their needs. Rampart reported high water and white nosed fish hitting the Rapids. The rapids also reported: “King season all over in Rapids. The only fishing is for daily dog food using summer chum and whitefish present. Fishers generally are reporting a lack of subsistence king needs being met which is rare for this area. Water is about average with a slight rise going on now. Water temp has been up and down all season with temperatures rather high now. Rapids fish wheel video project has a cumulative CPUE of 2850 Chinook which is good compared to the past 2000 to 2005 projects. 64% of that cumulative came from the 1st pulse of king. That compression of the run into one pulse and the smaller size of the king in that pulse could be part of the reason fishers are reporting lower catches, particularly fishers using large mesh nets”.

Manley has little fishing effort with most people concentrating on fires in the lower 48. Galena reported fishermen waiting for silvers and Koyukuk stated that the fall chums had arrived with run strength picking up and dropping water levels. Allakaket also reported dropping water and fishermen waiting for silvers. In Kaltag 2 out of eight fishers contacted were fishing. The people of St. Mary’s are actively berry picking rather than fishing at this time. Emmonak was hoping for better fish cutting weather to catch fall chums which are in. There is a mix there of fall chum, summer chum and cohos at this time.

**Department of Fisheries and Oceans – Canada**

**Fish Wheels**

680 Chinook caught in fish wheels to July 31-  
10-year average is 1,385

10-year average adjusted for 6 day late timing is 880

2006 fish wheel catch is approximately 80% of the average catch adjusted for late run timing and one fish wheel has not fished well throughout the season

2006 Peak fish wheel catches were recorded on July 30<sup>th</sup> and July 31<sup>st</sup> (catches were 75 and 79). This peak is usually observed earlier in the season which is consistent with late timing in 2006.

Abundance to July 25 13,700 with 95% CI of 10,000 to 18,000- wide CI- low tags and tag recoveries

Abundance to July 30<sup>th</sup> is 22,300 with total season projection of approximately 45,000 with late timing. Believe this estimate may be conservative and will likely be lower than the Eagle sonar count.

Also catching low numbers of chum salmon in the wheels

### **Whitehorse Fishway**

There is Chinook salmon in Whitehorse below the Fishway but none through to date Hatchery fish are showing up in our fish wheel catches last few days which is consistent with them appearing in abundance during the later part of the run.

### **Blind Creek Weir**

#### **Count to July 30 is 64**

Average to this date for the 1998/1999 and 2003-2005 average is 279

Average to this date for the same period and late run timing average is 40

	<b>2006</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>average</b>
30-Jul	64	140	554	700	0	1	279
Total Ct		525	792	1155	892	373	747
24-Jul		2	182	13	0	0	39
25-Jul		2	206	23	0	0	46

### **Big Salmon Sonar**

- 838 Chinook salmon counted to July 30

- July 30 count in 2005 was 1,859 (5,584 total count)

- July 25 count in 2005 was 560

Only the second year of the Big Salmon sonar program

### **Aboriginal Fishery**

- open with no restrictions. Reports of some fishers doing well while others have not yet met their needs

### **Sport Fishery**

- very little information available, although information suggests success rate in Tatchun Creek area has been low

### **Domestic Fishery**

-open on same schedule as Commercial Fishery- reports will be available post-season

### **Commercial Fishery**

Commercial Opening 1- 4 days- Catch 535 Ck- 7 fishers

Commercial Opening 2- 3 days- Catch 646 Ck- 7 fishers

Commercial Opening 3- 2 days- Catch 379 Ck- 7 fishers

Total 1,560 Chinook salmon and 2 chum salmon

*In 2006 there have been very conservative Commercial and Domestic Fishery open Periods. DFO has not decided what to do with respect to additional commercial and domestic fishery openings.*

## Alaska Department of Fish & Game

### *Summer Season Wrap-up*

<http://csfish.adfg.state.ak.us/newsrelease/view.php?dist=YUS&year=2006&species=400&num=42>

### *Fall Season:*

- The first significant pulse of Yukon River fall chum salmon began entering the mouth on July 16 and the size was estimated by the Pilot Station Sonar to be approximately 85,000.
- The pulse was followed by ten days of low passage before the second pulse began entering on July 27. Assessment of the second pulse by test nets was difficult due to stormy weather impacting net efficiency.
- The second pulse is just arriving at the Pilot Station sonar project at the time of this report so a pulse size estimate is not yet available.
- However, the second pulse is expected to be significantly larger than the first pulse because the test fisheries at Emmonak and Mountain Village noted 3-4 days of increased passage as compared to the one day of increased passage during the first pulse.
- The Pilot Station Sonar cumulative passage estimate of fall chum salmon through July 31 is 351,000 and 7,200 coho.
- With the strong first quarter, assessment at this time is that the 2006 fall chum salmon run size is consistent with the preseason projection and the total run size is expected to be near 1 million fish based on average timing.
- The drift test fish projects at Emmonak and Mountain Village corroborate the relative passage strength estimated by the Pilot Station sonar and the travel speed.
- The first pulse is thought to be currently in the vicinity of Ruby and the front of the second pulse is near Russian Mission.
- July 29<sup>th</sup> was the first commercial fall chum opening. 16,549 chum caught with an avg. weight of 7.1 pounds, 946 cohos were caught with an average weight of 6.4 lbs. The fish were bright and a good quality and there was a strong showing of five year olds.
- There are 2 buyers purchasing in Y-1 and a current opening in Y-1. There will be a second opening Thurs, Aug 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- The fall chum run should be adequate to meet subsistence, commercial and escapement needs; however, weak market demand reflects low fishing efforts due to weather and late runs. Fishermen and should stay up to date with processor/buyer needs to identify the market capacity, and reduce excess waste by reducing the amount of excess fish waiting on the docks for shipment.

### *ADFG – Related Projects Update*

Lower Yukon River Cooperative Drift Test Fishing – YDFDA, ADF&G, YR DFA

The project began July 16 at Emmonak with 1 day of high catches. That pulse was followed by 10 days of low passage. The second pulse began on July 27 and continued through July 31. A strong coastal storm coincided with the second pulse that limited test fishing efforts and contributed to low catch rates. The cumulative CPUE for the project through July 30 is 372 which is near the 5-year average of 323.

Mountain Village Drift Test Fishing – Asacarsarmiut Traditional Council and BSFA

The project began on July 17 with 3 days during the first pulse which was followed by 9 days of low passage. The second pulse arrived at the project site on July 29 and continues to pass at the time of this report. The cumulative CPUE for the project through July 30 is 791 which is above the 9-year average of 594.

Pilot Station Sonar Project – YDFDA, YRDFA, ADF&G

The cumulative sonar estimate of fall chum salmon through July 30 is 298,000 which is above the average for the project of 147,000. The cumulative passage estimate of 4,600 coho salmon is above average and the coho run does not typically start building until around August 7.

Kaltag Drift Test Fishing –

The project began on July 25 with daily catches increasing on July 28, which corresponds closely with the predicted travel time of the first pulse. The cumulative CPUE for the project through July 30 is 328 which is above the 7-year average of 174.

### **US Fish and Wildlife Service**

The East Fork Andreafsky River weir's last day of counts was July 27. The preliminary season - ending Chinook salmon counts were 6,463, which is above average, and season ending summer chum counts were 101,465, which is well above average.

The Gisasa River weir's last day of counts was July 28. The preliminary season ending Chinook salmon counts were 2,833, which is slightly above average, and season ending summer chum counts were 224,509 which is well above average.

No data is available for Henshaw Creek as it was flooded for most of its operation and is currently being pulled.

The BLM Tozitna River weir's last day of counts will be approximately August 12. At this time 422 Chinook salmon have been counted which is below average, and 14,057 summer chum have been counted which is near average. High water has affected this project so counts should be considered minimum.

The Chandalar River sonar will begin counting fall chum salmon on August 8.

### **Discussion:**

Q: Is there an estimate for the numbers of coho in Norton Sound.

A: Unalakeet's coho run is above average for this early in the run. Pilot Station sonar estimates are also running ahead of historical averages for this early in the season.

Q: Will there be any additional openings in Y-6?

A: Y-6 is open now and will be open again next week. The average is 3,000 per day. It should be ok to increase the effort. There are fewer fishermen today than in the past.

Q: Is there a market for roe?

A: There should be some. Districts 5B and 5C have some buyer interest.

Q: Is the fall chum run on track with estimates?

A: Yes.

Q: What is the long-term impact if there are low king returns to spawning areas?

A: While you increase the risk of low returns in the future, it is not likely that one year of low return alone will collapse the run. Currently we are fishing from spawning in 2000 when there were lower runs. Under healthy environmental conditions fry will mature and may return at high rates. There are other variables, though, that affects run strength and may cause poor returns.

## Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference Call #11 - August 8, 2006

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Emmonak, Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, Hughes, Galena, Nenana, Mayo, Old Crow, Whitehorse.

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Pilot Station
USFWS - Fairbanks
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage
DFO - Canada
Interior Fish Processors
Boreal Fish Processors

### Subsistence Reports:

In Emmonak two fishers had fished last week and the community has met 50% of their subsistence needs. Most fishers are waiting until berry picking season is over. In Kaltag no one is fishing with exception of a test fishery which caught four to eight good sized, healthy summer chums. A fisherman in Nulato also reported catching eight fall and one summer chum last night, thirty fall chum the night before, and another 30 the night before that. Koyukuk also reported catching an average of about thirty per day with three cohos caught today in a set net. Cohos are showing in small numbers in Huslia and a fisherman reported nets out most of the week with a few females caught. The females were in deterioration and had very loose eggs. The fishermen in Huslia that are fishing are only catching enough fish per day to feed their dogs for that day. Galena has been slow with one wheel in operation and one fisher seining for silvers. Minto reported drift in the river and the summer chums slacking off. The rapids reported: “First bright colored fall chum pulse has come and gone. Presently some front runners of the second pulse seem to be arriving as indicated by nicer fish and increasing numbers. Recent weather has decreased fishing effort. There are only 5 camps fishing in Rapids at present. Water height is at average for this time of year. Water temp has been up and down all season with temperatures average, given limited 2003 - 2005 data. Rapids fish wheel video project numbers are currently rising, as expected, in response to the second Pilot Sonar pulse 18 days ago. Actual cumulative 24 hour fall chum catch is 4,996. Water adjusted cumulative passage guess through Rapids is 60,944.” In Mayo they are fishing with 50% of their needs met. They did report premature ripeness of the fish, low water, and higher than normal water temperatures. Whitehorse Ta’an Kwach’an Council reported a small fishery that only amounted to one or two Chinook caught per day.

### Department of Fisheries and Oceans – Canada

DFO reported the total reported Canadian First Nation catch is around 1,500 which is far below the historic average of 6,000 during the past three years; however, fish are late this year. There was an August fourth through seventh opening and the final numbers from this opening are still

not available and DFO is still waiting on tag recoveries and the harvest information (so far about 200 fish have been reported). The Blind Creek Weir had a count of 424; however, this count is not accurate and 50 to 90% of the fish could have migrated past without detection. The Big Salmon sonar project reported an August 5 count of 3,282 which is higher than last years count of 3,743. This project is reporting higher daily counts than last year (this is the second year of operation for the project). The fishwheel has reported a total Chinook catch of 1008 which is lower than the ten year average of 1543. Forty-four Chinook have passed through the fishway at Whitehorse which is comparable to the historic averages adjusted for the late run-timing.

### **Alaska Department of Fish & Game**

#### ***Fall Run Assessment:***

July 16<sup>th</sup> pulse at Pilot Station was small with 85,000 chums passing. The second pulse passed Pilot Station between July 27 and August 2 with a count of 268,000. This pulse lasted six days with was longer in duration than the average. There was a CPUE reported on August 6 of 486,000 which is well above the historic average of 268,000. Fall chum runs are showing strength and will be above average with an expected return of close to 1,000,000. The front of the second pulse should be nearing Kaltag. The cumulative passage of Coho at Pilot Station is 22,000 already compared to a historic average of 6,100. The age composition is 27% four year olds and 73% five year olds. This is close to opposite the normal age composition.

Y1 management area has had four commercial periods so far with a catch of 31,700 chum and 3939 cohos. The average weight of fall chums was 7.2 pounds which is an increase compared to recent years. The average weight of cohos is 6.2 pounds. Y2 has a catch of 2,915 fall chum and 63 cohos.

#### ***Summer Run:***

Chena tower: Has been removed. It had a count of 2,900 Chinook (below average) and 35,000 summer chum (above average).

Salcha: 10,385 Chinook and 91,377 summer chum

Eagle: To date 70,000 Chinook have passed. The species composition has been 90% Chinook and 10% other species.

Y6: The Y6 management area is open and so far 5,762 Chinook have been harvested. The opening will end at 6 p.m. tomorrow and there will be no additional openings due to a lack of market interest.

### **US Fish and Wildlife Service**

The service reported that the summer projects are currently wrapping up.

#### **Discussion:**

Q: Which pulse is passing through the fishway in Whitehorse now?

A: It is the first pulse. Wild fish are returning vs. hatchery fish so it is likely there are fish on the way.

Q: Will there be additional commercial fishery openings in Canada and how will low catch #'s affect that?

A: We are still evaluating the run and have not made the decision yet. The high percentage of females in the later part of the run will be taken into consideration before making the decision. While sets are not doing well, there still seems there may be an abundance of fish in the run as indicated by sonar counts in the Big Salmon River project. The quality of fish being caught will also be taken into consideration. The sets may not be doing well do to timing, high water, and debris.

Q: Is there a third pulse of chums coming in from the mouth?

A: The third pulse has not materialized yet. The second pulse should be near Kaltag and Nulato.

Q: Are silvers coming up the Koyukuk?

A: The first pulse went up around July 19. The second pulse should be there now. The pulse is moving about 30 to 34

## Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference Call #12 - August 15, 2006

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Whitehorse, Beaver, Rampart, Galena, Koyukuk, Huslia, Nulato, Grayling, St. Mary's, Emmonak

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Pilot Station
USFWS - Fairbanks
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage, Fairbanks
DFO - Canada
AVCP
Boreal Fish Processors

### Subsistence Reports:

A visitor to Teslin reported that there were people fishing, but not many fish being caught yet and tonight they would be pulling nets until a better period comes. In Whitehorse varying levels of fishing success and effort were reported from first nations. Some first nation fishers are not meeting their needs while others are doing fairly well. A representative from the Ta'an Kwach'an council reported one to two fish per day. An e-mailed report from the Selkirk Renewable Resource Council in Pelly stated that "...fishing is pretty well done here now. People are stopping the fishing [effort] because the fish are getting soft now." Downriver in Beaver, the king run was over with no one fishing. Three of the fishermen in Beaver will fish in September to make up for the low king catch. The rapids reported: "First bright colored fall chum pulse has come and gone. Presently some front runners of the second pulse seem to be arriving as indicated by nicer fish and increasing numbers. Recent weather has decreased fishing effort. There are only 5 camps fishing in Rapids at present. Water height is at average for this time of year. Water temp has been up and down all season with temperatures average, given limited 2003 - 2005 data. Rapids fish wheel video project numbers are currently rising, as expected, in response to the second Pilot Sonar pulse 18 days ago. Actual cumulative 24 hour fall chum catch is 4,996. Water adjusted cumulative passage guess through Rapids is 60,944." The Galena representative stated that a couple of people were fishing in 4A with silvers looking good and a catch composition of 15% summer chum. Koyukuk also reported good silver fishing with fifty caught in one drift. Huslia had a couple of people fishing as well and catching some silvers. The water in Huslia had a lot of debris. In Nulato, there was good fishing last week with drift nets doing well and catching silvers. The effort in Nulato has decreased since, with many people leaving to fight fires or pick berries. Grayling reported good fishing in the past week; although the effort has decreased with people there also leaving to fight fires or pick berries. St. Mary's did not have a lot going on for subsistence. There was a commercial opening yesterday with a large bump of fall chum going up the river. Emmonak is still



looking towards better drying weather. Four of the nine families interviewed had fished. One family was done and the rest were at 50% of their needs with better catches than earlier in the season.

### **Department of Fisheries and Oceans – Canada**

DFO reported Chinook are still crossing the border. DFO initial estimates project the border escapement at 44,000 to 49,000 which probably biased low by the Department's own account. In the last fishery there were many tag recoveries which suggest that there was a mixing issue with the tags released in the last fishery period. All the tag recovery needs to be re-evaluated to determine a more accurate post-season estimate.

The August 15 project return for the Whitehorse fishery Chinook salmon count in Canada is 1300 when adjusted for 3-day late run timing (957 when not adjusted). This is significantly higher than the 1996-2005 average cumulative run of 886.

The August 13 estimated cumulative return for the Big Salmon River Chinook salmon count is 6,204 which is above last years return of 5,189.

The August 13 Blind Creek Weir estimated cumulative Chinook return is 654.

The cumulative combined catch of fall chum salmon in DFO fishwheels for August 14 is 94.

DFO reports that overall the first nation fisheries appear to have had a good run; although the first nation fisheries are reporting mixed results. The mixed results could be due to late run timing - resulting in a reduced fishing effort during peak periods.

### **Alaska Department of Fish & Game**

#### ***Fall Run Assessment:***

August 15<sup>th</sup> is the average  $\frac{3}{4}$  point for the test fishery in Emmonak. The first pulse of fall chum is currently near circle and estimated at 85,000 fish. The second pulse has 268,000 and should be near Ruby, and the third pulse is currently passing Pilot Station sonar with no estimate at this time. The cumulative estimate for the run to date is 525,000 which is above the average of 389,000. All reports show the early run going up the main stem and past the Tanana River confluence.

The Coho run has an average first quarter point on August 16. To date there is an estimate of 37,000 which is above average. However, the return average weights are a little low. Also the run is typically comprised of many four year olds, while this year five year olds dominate the run.

The seven commercial openings in Y1 have yielded 67,600 fall chum and 11,600 coho. Y2 openings have yielded 15,400 fall chum and 12,900 coho. The coho average size is 6.1 pounds. The average fall chum is 7.2 pounds.

#### ***Fall Management for the week:***

We are passed the mid-point of the average fall chum run and waiting for a fourth pulse. Currently, there is a projection of 750,000 to 1 million cumulative return estimates. This is adequate to meet escapement, subsistence and commercial goals. Y1 and Y2 have a commercial opening taking place. There was a shift in the amount of time in between commercial openings from a twelve hour to a six hour period. This

allows time for subsistence fishing. There will be a Y5b and Y5c opening this week coordinated with the buyers. Fishermen should verify the buyer's demands and schedules before fishing. Additionally fishing periods may be announced.

**Discussion:**

Q: Will there be commercial periods scheduled for Y5 and Y6 fall chum.

A: Yes. They have been scheduled and faxed/e-mailed out.

Q: Will there be commercial fishing after September 1 for coho based upon the market and coho management plan?

A: Due to high fall chum returns there is not a coho management plan currently in effect. While the coho run is good, it is not exceptional therefore it is unlikely that there will be commercial openings after September 1.

Comment: There was a request made to distribute the commercial and subsistence opening and closing schedules more thoroughly.

Response: Are you not receiving these and how can we reach you?

Commentator response: You are reaching me; I just want to ensure that everyone has the information. I have been posting them in my community myself. (Paraphrased)

**Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference  
Call #13 - August 22, 2006**

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Emmonak, St. Mary’s, Pilot Station, Kaltag, Huslia, Hughes, Galena, Tanana, Rampart rapids, Mayo,

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Pilot Station
USFWS - Fairbanks, Anchorage, Galena
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage, Fairbanks
DFO - Canada

**Subsistence Reports:**

The lower river is currently in a Y-1 commercial opening. Nine subsistence fishers were interviewed and only one fished; the other interviewed fishermen felt it was too wet to cut fish. In St. Mary’s there was also a commercial opening. Quite a few of the fishers there are picking up fall chums and the cohos are still running. Pilot Station reported some fishing for fall chum and silvers to can. High fuel costs deterred many commercial fishers in Pilot Station from fishing and only a few went out. Kaltag reported high water and only the test fishery project fishing with four to six fall chum being caught in good shape and of a good size. In Huslia, fishing is slow and water is high. Fishers there pulled nets due to continuing rain. There were whitefish, chum and silvers that have been caught in Huslia. High gas costs there are also deterring the fishing effort. Galena reported that fall chum fishing was completed and most people there have met their subsistence needs; however, there was also a report from Galena that some people were still fishing to ensure some of the elders who can’t fish have their needs met also. A wheel in Tanana has been catching ocean bright chum and cohos. Drift in the Tanana is high and bad weather is impeding the drift fishers. The rapids asked: “Because fishers are behind on fishing because of bad weather, and the lack of persons fishing nowadays and fishing effort expected and if run is good enough for commercial would it be possible to go to 7 days a week as a way of helping the subsistence lifestyle survive a little better?” ADFG will look into it. Mayo reported a considerable fishing effort and needs generally being met with longer fishing periods due to high water and bad weather.

**Department of Fisheries and Oceans – Canada**

There is no update on current Chinook border escapement. The projection for the run border escapement is 44,000 to 49,000 Chinook. The Big Salmon River project has a projected escapement of 7,300; the Blind Creek weir project has a projected escapement of 677; and the fishway at Whitehorse has a projected escapement of 1,310. This is an unusual year with late returns, a strong component of wild fish, and a high proportion of females. Aerial surveys have reported positive returns. There are an estimated 1,381 Chinook salmon in the Little Salmon River which is above the ten year average of 894. 1,140 Chinook are reported in the Big Salmon River, 601 in the Nisutlin River, and 114 in the Wolf River. Although these are promising counts it is still early in the run. The fish appearing on the spawning

grounds appear to be a little above the ten year average in size. The total First Nation catch to date is 2,254 with some aboriginal fishers reporting they have met their needs and some reporting they have not. The late timing of the run and poor weather are likely to blame for the mixed results. The chum return to date is 106 caught in fishwheels which is below average, but it is still early. The weir and the mark recapture program in the Porcupine River are still setting up.

### **Alaska Department of Fish & Game**

#### ***Fall Run Assessment:***

There have been four significant pulses of fall chum entering the river. Eighty percent of the fall chum run has already entered, and fifty percent of the coho run has passed into the river. 718,000 fall chum have been estimated to pass through Pilot Station with a total run size estimate of between 900,000 and 1,000,000. The cumulative coho estimate is 75,000 as of August 21. This number is less than the past three year average. Today is the historical midpoint of the coho run. The first pulse of fall chum was estimated to be 80,000 and is currently crossing the border. The second pulse is estimated to be 268,000 and near Steven's Village. The third pulse is estimated at 128,000 and nearing Anvik. The fourth pulse is estimated to be less than 100,000 and passing through the Pilot Station sonar project. The fall run has a stronger five year old component and a weaker four year old component than expected. The commercial openings in Y1 have yielded 73,000 fall chum, and 24,000 coho. The commercial openings in Y2 have yielded 28,000 fall chum and 5,900 coho. The coho average size is 6.1 pounds. The average fall chum is 7.2 pounds. A total of 206 commercial permit holders have fished in Y1 and Y2. The first commercial period in Y-5B and Y-5C yielded no fish due to low buyer demand. The second commercial period in Y-5B and Y-5C yielded 1,700 fall chums caught by two fishermen.

The high water and heavy rains are hindering escapement projects on Henshaw Creek and the Chandalar River.

#### ***Fall Management for the week:***

Y1 has two commercial periods scheduled this week. Y2 also has two commercial periods scheduled this week. 5B and 5C currently have concurrent commercial and subsistence openings for five days a week. Due to low commercial fishing effort the subsistence schedule will be relaxed.

#### ***Summer Update/Summary:***

The Salcha River tower has completed its escapement tracking for the season. Final counts show 10,400 Chinook – which is slightly above average; 112,000 chums which is well above average. The Eagle sonar has a count of 73,000 Chinook which is lower than last years count of 82,000. Preliminary data from the *Ichthyophonus* project at Emmonak indicate an infection of 16% which is lower than last year (24%).

#### **Discussion:**

Q: With the four year old return lower, is this an average return for four year olds?

A: Typically, at the front end of a return the five year olds are stronger and the four year olds get more dominant towards the end of the run. It is too early to tell at this time, but the four year olds are tracking below average right now. We will have to continue to monitor the run before making assumptions.

Comment: There were two requests made to go to a seven day per week subsistence schedule in 5B and 5C.

Response: 5B and 5C were on a five day per week schedule but due to commercial openings were shifted to 2 48 hour subsistence periods. With little commercial effort during those periods, the subsistence schedule will be re-evaluated and likely relaxed.

Comment: Inlet Fisheries is only buying fish at the bridge because it is too expensive to boat up to the Rapids; therefore a seven day a week subsistence schedule in 5B and 5C concurrent with a commercial opening should not have too great an impact on escapement.

Comment: 4A, 4B, and 4C requested a seven day a week subsistence schedule.

Response: 4A, 4B, and 4C have had seven day a week subsistence openings since July 6, which run concurrent with commercial openings.

Comment: The Y-4 subsistence openings were not clearly communicated.

Response: ADFG will look into that further and determine where the miscommunication occurred.

Comment: Even with seven day a week subsistence scheduling we still didn't catch enough fish due to high water and poor weather. (Huslia)

Comment: The lower river sympathizes with the upriver communities and shares their burdens related to poor weather. We support a seven day subsistence opening at this time in the season when the escapement goals are being met and subsistence needs are not.

Question: Is there any more significant pulses entering the river.

Answer: There may be, but it is unlikely. The majority of the return has entered the river and the remaining fish are expected to come in more dispersed in small patches.

## Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference Call #14 - August 29, 2006

**Sponsored by:** Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

**Funded by:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

- Agenda:**
- \* Village identification and subsistence reports
  - Management update by Alaska Department of Fish and Game; follow-up by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
  - Local input by YRDFA Board Members, Coordinating Fisheries, Committee, Inter-Tribal consortiums, and/or Yukon River Panel Members.
  - Public comments.

**Communities involved in the call:** Rampart rapids, Nenana, Huslia, Nulato, Kaltag, St. Mary’s, Emmonak

**Government and Other Organizations/Entities:**

ADFG – Emmonak, Anchorage, Fairbanks
USFWS - Fairbanks, Anchorage, Galena
USFWS, OSM – Anchorage, Fairbanks
DFO - Canada

**Subsistence Reports:**

The Rampart rapids reported: *“In between second and third pulse of fall chum salmon now. There are three fishers left in Rapids and all are still cutting dry dog food and later will be cribbing fish. Everyone is catching all they need although the bad weather has put fishers behind some. Fishers appreciate no closures. Water height just crested and is the highest for this time of year looking at 1996 to present. Water temperature has been up and down all season with temperatures running slightly cold at present. Rapids fish wheel video project numbers are down as we are in between pulses. Counting about 1800 a day now. As of August 28th, the cumulative 24 hour fall chum catch is 27,909. Discharge adjusted cumulative passage guess through Rapids is 249,136. Using 1996-2005 fall chum data at fishwheel site, run so far is above average.”*

Nenana reported using a fishwheel to collect more fish for dogs, and catching a couple hundred fish overnight comprised of fall chum, summer chum and a lot of whitefish. Nenana also reported water dropping and coho just starting to show up. The mix of chum fish being caught by the wheel appears to be 50% fall chum and 50% summer chum. Galena reported high water levels and high debris levels resulting in fishers pulling out set nets. Huslia reported water too high to drift and most of the community out moose hunting instead. Nulato also reported high water and no active fisheries effort. There is a school setting up for a culture camp in Nulato that will be likely to fish in the fall. Kaltag reported high water and debris with only the test fishery fishing at this time and catching twenty to twenty-five fall chum per day along with sheefish and wt. fish. A fisher in Grayling caught fifty-eight fall chum over the past week and reported lots of fish jumping. The majority of fall chum subsistence fishing has ended in St. Mary’s with only two families smoking at this time. The majority of residents are preparing for moose hunting and there is one last commercial opening scheduled this week. Emmonak is also close to the end of subsistence fall chum fishing with only a few residents canning. Emmonak requested another commercial opening after the first.

**Department of Fisheries and Oceans – Canada**

The most recent data for escapement numbers is still being evaluated. The most recent cumulative numbers for Chinook can be found in last weeks teleconference notes (call #13). The fishway has an escapement of about 1,654 to date and a target escapement goal of 1,720. Several fish are still making their way to the fishway. There is a strong wild Chinook vs. hatchery component this year at the fishway and many large fish have made it to spawning grounds. The mark/recapture tagging program data indicates a conservative potential return of 43,000 to 49,000.

Fall chum border escapement has increased from 10 per day prior to August nineteenth to about fifty per day. At this time the cumulative fall chum border escapement is 422 which is below the ten year average of 493; however, numbers are building.

DFO will have a commercial opening later this week and/or early next week. The data from the opening will be used to better estimate border escapement numbers. DFO predicts that the upper Yukon will have average to above average run strength. The Porcupine River is the exception, and run strength is lower than expected. The Fishing branch weir is only 50% operational due to high water.

### **Alaska Department of Fish & Game**

#### ***Fall Run Assessment:***

Currently 90% of the expected fall chum and 70% of the expected coho have entered the river system. As of August 28, Pilot Station sonar had counted 770,000 fall chum which is above the average of 595,000. The current projection for the run is between 800,000 and 900,000 fall chum. There is some uncertainty around the estimates due to a few straggling summer chums in the mix. At this time the first two pulses should be in the upper river. The coho projection is on target for 114,000 which is near the ten-year average but a lower return than the last three years.

The first fall pulse is estimated at 85,000 fish which included some summer chum.

The second pulse is estimated at 281,000 and should be nearing Circle.

The third pulse is estimated at 128,000 and nearing Ruby.

The fourth pulse is estimated at 40,000 and passing Anvik.

This year is unusual in that the fall chum run age class ratio at this time is 38% four-year olds and 61% five-year olds. Typically, four-year olds dominate the run.

The average weight of fall chum caught is 7.2 lbs. The average weight of coho caught is 6.2 lbs. Y5-B and Y5-C had a low commercial effort due to poor weather, high gas prices, and high water.

Approximately 5,000 fall chum were caught in the Y5-B and 5Y-C fisheries.

The Department of Fish and Game is announcing the extension of the commercial salmon fishing season in District Y-1 until September 5.

District Y-1 will be open for two additional 9-hour commercial salmon fishing periods. In District Y-1, commercial fishing will be open from 10:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 3, and on Tuesday, September 5.

The preliminary total Fall Season commercial harvest through August 29 is approximately 126,000 fall chum and 47,000 coho salmon. The Pilot Station Sonar passage estimate through August 29 is approximately 782,000 fall chum and 123,000 coho salmon. Salmon run assessment information indicates that both fall chum and coho salmon runs are near average and a portion of the fall chum guideline harvest range remains for the lower river districts.

Salmon quality is declining, but there is some continued market interest. Based on the harvest rate experienced the last three years during early September, the available surplus will be sufficient to accommodate the anticipated harvest.

In District Y-1, subsistence fishing is closed 6 hours before, during, and 6 hours after each commercial fishing period. Subsistence fishing in Districts Y-2 and Y-3 will remain open 7-days a week. District Y-1

will be open to subsistence fishing 7 days a week beginning 1:00 a.m. Wednesday, September 6. Districts 4 and 5 continue to have 7 days per week subsistence openings.

The Department does not anticipate making any more commercial announcements

*For the most recent (8/29) ADFG fall run assessment news release, go to:*

<http://csfish.adfg.state.ak.us/newsrelease/view.php?year=2006&dist=YUF&species=400&num=28>

## USFWS

High water has temporarily rendered the Chandalar River weir project inoperable. The weir should be operational by August 30.

### Discussion:

Question: When did the fourth pulse enter the river?

Answer: August 29<sup>th</sup>. This appears to have been a condensed grouping of fish at first, but they spread out/dispersed before reaching the Pilot Station sonar.

Question: In Canada, how does this year's return compare to last years?

Answer: It is still early to make this assessment. As it looks now – the run was late, but it appears stronger than it initially was projected. It is likely that the late run, high water and poor weather reduced the catch numbers used to assess the run. The size of the fish and numbers of the fish appearing on the spawning grounds look promising so far.

Comment: The lower river subsistence catches were also affected by high water and poor weather.

Comment: There was a request from Emmonak to extend the commercial season past September 1<sup>st</sup>.

Response: ADFG extended the season following the conference.

Question: Is anyone still buying on the lower river?

Answer: Yes, QuikPak is still purchasing fish; Bering Sea Fisheries is reported as ending this week.

Comment: Huslia is having some difficulty catching enough fish for their dogs due to high water. There are seven to eight mushers with up to sixteen dogs each. The dog/chum salmon are being caught are ragged. As the water has started to recede, some people are considering putting out nets again. Whitefish, sheefish, and pike are running also.

**Question: Is this the last teleconference of the season?**

**Answer: Yes, it is.**