

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

KUSKOKWIM RIVER
INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION





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Wilson Twitchell



Della Tinker



Wilson Twitchell



Rachel Konteh



Kimberly Jackson

ABOUT US

The Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) is a P.L. 93-638 contracted, 501(c)3 non-profit organization representing the 33 federally recognized Tribes of the Kuskokwim River watershed in fisheries management, research, and monitoring. KRITFC works to protect and sustain our Kuskokwim salmon fisheries and traditional ways of life using Traditional and Indigenous Knowledge and the best available Western science.

MISSION

To be the voice of the Kuskokwim, living and sharing our traditional way of life.

VISION

A bountiful Kuskokwim River watershed supported by sovereign Indigenous stewardship.

VALUES

Unity:

Consensus-driven discourse and decision-making.

Sharing in abundance and scarcity:

With families, community members, and people in need.

Respect for all life:

Respect for fish, ecosystems, and users.

Stewardship for our ancestors and our future generations:

Honoring our spiritual connection and responsibilities to past and future generations.



LETTER FROM OUR LEADERS

It is hard to sum up 2022 in a few words. We think it is safe to say that, although that we have never experienced a year like this one, we feel more invigorated than ever to protect our salmon and way of life.

For the first time in living memory, Kuskokwim coho salmon failed to return strongly, leading to nearly a month-long fishing closure from mid-August to mid-September to protect a record-low return. This, on top of windowed conservation closures in June and July to protect poor chum and Chinook salmon returns, took an extreme toll on our communities and ecosystem. Each member of our watershed, from our Elders and youth to the bears and spruce trees, feels the loss of healthy, abundant salmon runs as if we have lost a member of our family.

Not only did our salmon face unprecedented times, but our organization was stretched in new ways in 2022. To respond to our communities' need for equitable representation in Federal salmon management, our Commissioners voted to designate and appoint a fifth In-Season Manager to represent our headwaters communities separate from the middle river In-Season Manager. Our team experienced several staff transitions; worked through an extended season of salmon management; and pushed valiantly, but thus far unsuccessfully, to implement protective measures for our salmon in the marine environment.

Yet just as the south winds in the spring bring fish up our river, the challenges and unfamiliarity of 2022 brought opportunities for KRITFC, our partnerships, and our Tribally-led stewardship to flourish. We welcomed new staff, In-Season Managers, and Council members to our team. We have strengthened our relationships and advocacy alongside other Tribal leaders in the AYK and Bristol Bay regions. We collaboratively managed salmon in the lower Kuskokwim with Yukon Delta NWR for the seventh year in a row—for the life cycle of a fully mature adult king salmon.

Most importantly, we have boldly carried the stories of our multi-year, multi-species salmon disaster on the Kuskokwim to management agencies, researchers, commercial fishing industry representatives, and Tribal leaders. The heart of our message is this: Every fish counts. Every smolt who leaves the gravel and every spawner who returns to its redd is a survivor of climate change and the waste of industrial fishing. Every salmon that we collectively protect—not just on our river, but throughout the fish's migratory range—is a salmon that will feed our future generations.

We are grateful for everyone who has joined us in our work to amplify this message and sustain our salmon and traditional ways of life. Together, we continue to strive for the wellbeing of our families and our salmon, and we will succeed with our voices in unity. *Quyana, Tsen'ahn, Thank you.*



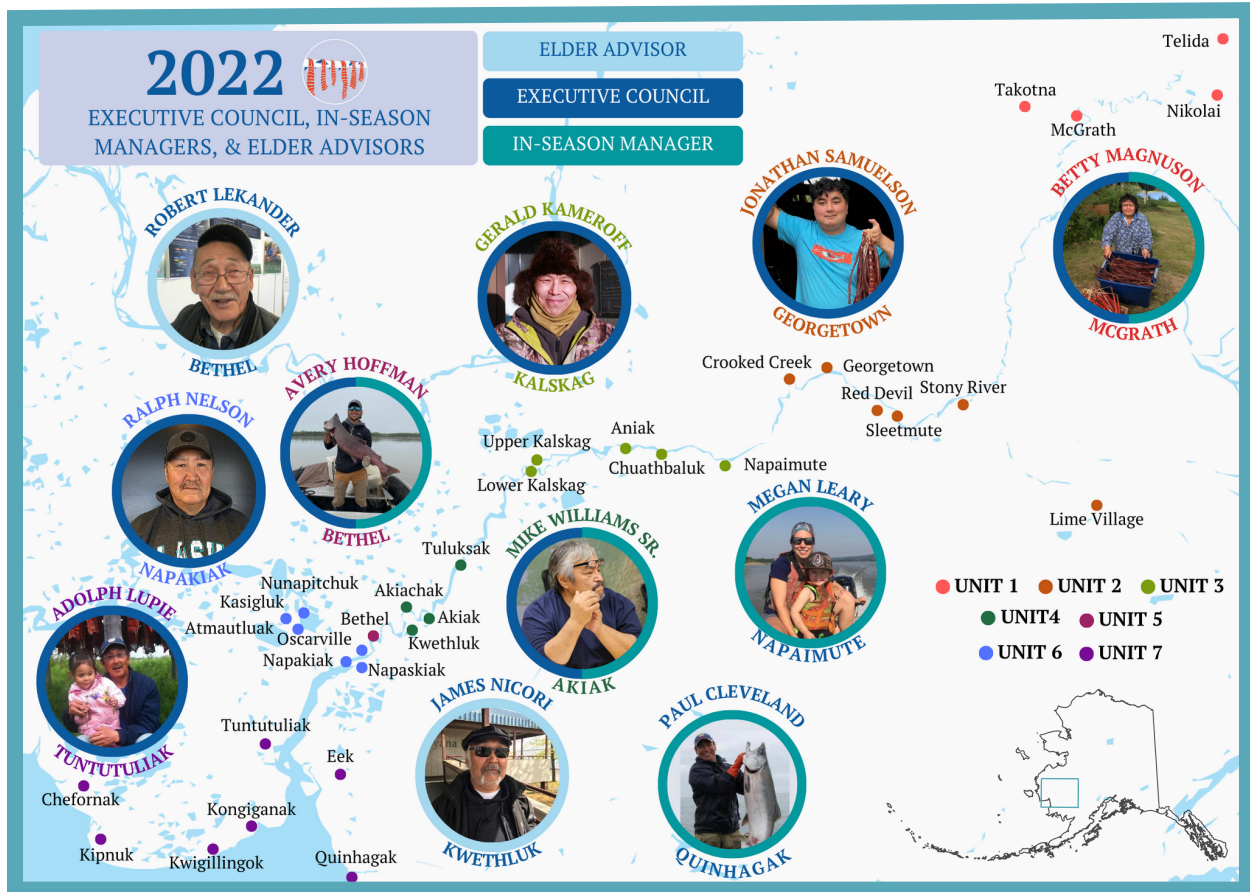
Dr. Michael Williams Sr.
2021–2022 Chair



Kevin Whitworth
Executive Director



WHO WE ARE



KRITFC's Executive Council is composed of **seven Commissioner representatives**, one elected from each of the seven river units. The Council Chair position rotates every two years between the upper, middle, and lower river communities. The Council also includes **at least one Elder Advisor**.

Our In-Season Managers spend each salmon season at the federal management table negotiating and advocating for conservation-minded management and continued subsistence fishing priorities. In 2022, our full Commission body passed a **resolution to appoint a fifth In-Season Manager representing the headwaters communities** to the management team.

2022 EXECUTIVE COUNCIL & IN-SEASON MANAGERS

Unit 1: Betty Magnuson
Unit 2: Jonathan Samuelson, *Vice-Chair*
Unit 3: Gerald Kameroff
Unit 4: Mike Williams Sr., *Chair*
Unit 5: Avery Hoffman, *Secretary*
Unit 6: Ralph Nelson
Unit 7: Adolph Lupie

Headwaters ISM: Betty Magnuson
Middle River ISM: Megan Leary
Lower River ISM: Mike Williams Sr.
Lower River/Bethel ISM: Avery Hoffman
Tundra and Coast ISM: Paul Cleveland

Elder Advisor: Robert Lekander
Elder Advisor: James Nicori



2022 COMMISSIONERS

Unit 1

Telida: Jimmy Nikolai
Nikolai: Claude "Joe" Petruska
McGrath: Betty Magnuson
Takotna: Robert Perkins

Unit 2

Stony River: Tom Willis
Sleetmute: Ellen Yako
Georgetown: Jonathan Samuelson
Crooked Creek: Tim Zaukar

Unit 3

Napaimute: Megan Leary
Chuathbaluk: Tracy Simeon
Aniak: Wayne Morgan
Upper Kalskag: Gerald Kameroff
Lower Kalskag: Walter Morgan Sr.

Unit 4

Tuluksak: Noah Alexie
Akiak: Mike Williams Sr.
Akiachak: Phillip Peter Sr.
Kwethluk: Martin Andrew

Unit 5

Bethel: Avery Hoffman

Unit 6

Napaskiak: Chris Larson
Napakiak: Ralph Nelson
Atmautluak: Melvin Egoak
Kasigluk: Natalia Brink
Nunapitchuk: Golga Frederick

Unit 7

Tuntutuliak: Adolph Lupie
Eek: Stella Alexie
Chefornak: Alex Nicori
Quinhagak: Paul Cleveland

Note: The communities of Lime Village, Red Devil, Oscarville, Kongiganak, Kwigillingok, and Kipnuk do not currently have authorizing resolutions or voting Commissioners with KRITFC. Although KRITFC does not officially represent these Tribes, it remains hopeful they will become a part of its compact.

PARTNERS

We could not be where we are without our research, management, and advocacy partners, including:

- Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Tribal Consortium
- Association of Village Council Presidents
- Bering Sea Fishermen's Association
- Kawerak Inc.
- Nikolai Edzeno' Tribal Council
- Organized Village of Kwethluk
- Orutsararmut Native Council
- Takotna Tribal Council
- Tanana Chiefs Conference
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge
- Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission

2022 STAFF & CONSULTANTS

- Kevin Whitworth | *Executive Director, Biologist*
- Nikki Pollock | *Operations Manager*
- Terese Schomogyi | *Programs Manager, Jesuit/AmeriCorps Volunteer 2020-2022*
- Andrew Magel | *Fish Technician, Jesuit/AmeriCorps Volunteer 2022-2023*
- Dr. Joseph Spaeder | *Salmon Biology Consultant*
- Dr. Jim Simon | *Anthropology Consultant*
- Dr. William Bechtol | *Biometrician Consultant*
- LaMont Albertson | *CBHM Program Manager*

Quyana, Tsen'ahn to our staff who transitioned out of our team in 2022:

Mary Peltola, former Executive Director, and Casey Rangel, former Executive Administrator.

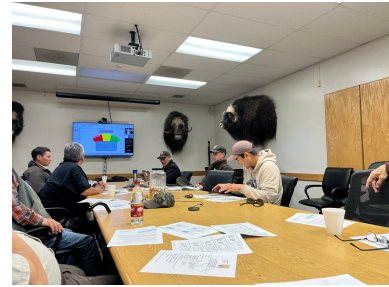


Credit all: Terese Schomogyi/KRITFC

SALMON MANAGEMENT & STEWARDSHIP

Collaborative salmon management and stewardship is at the core of our work. In 2016, KRITFDC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service–Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge as partners in Kuskokwim salmon management. Today, our Tribal-Federal partnership is stronger than ever, as evidenced by our work and successes in 2022:

- We created our **second joint KRITFC–Yukon Delta NWR Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Strategy and Salmon Harvest Strategy** to guide our collaborative management decisions.
- We utilized **adaptive, precautionary management principles to manage the Chinook and chum salmon runs from June 1 to July 21**. Our Tribal-Federal team monitored but did not manage the coho salmon run, which proved to be the lowest on record, in part because in-season data indicated there were too few fish to provide for any Federal subsistence fishing opportunity. **We were grieved that families throughout the Kuskokwim were unable to meet their silver salmon needs** because of a nearly month-long fishing closure throughout the drainage.
- Our team provided **11 subsistence gillnet fishing opportunities between June 1 and July 16**, in addition to fishing opportunities using alternative gear types, within Yukon Delta NWR boundaries in the lower Kuskokwim. **KRITFC estimates that 29,950 kings, 25,400 sockeye, and 3,630 chum salmon were harvested** between Tuntutuliak and Akiak during these opportunities.
- KRITFC led the compilation of in-season salmon monitoring and harvest data into near-weekly **In-Season Assessment packages**, reviewed by our 5 Tribal In-Season Managers and the fisheries management team at Yukon Delta NWR throughout the season as part of their decision-making process.
- **Together, we achieved our rebuilding escapement goal target range (100,000–120,000) for Chinook salmon with a preliminarily estimated escapement of 105,774 fish**. Meeting this drainage-wide escapement goal was only possible because of the eighth year of subsistence fishing closures and subsistence-dependent communities' sacrifices for the conservation of king salmon.



Terese Schomogyi/KRITFC



Crystal Lang



Ben Evon

Quyana, Tsen'ahn, Thank you to our Tribal-Federal team for their sustained, indefatigable work throughout this challenging summer. For more information about the state of our salmon, read our 2022 Kuskokwim River Salmon Situation Report, available at kuskosalmon.org/documents.

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Chinook, chum, and sockeye
salmon gillnet opportunities

29,950

kings harvested
Lower Kuskoko

105,774

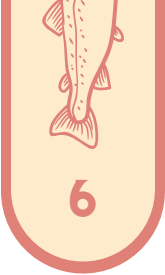
king spawners

Met escapement range

Near record-low | Lower Kuskoko

3,630

chums harvested



SALMON RESEARCH & MONITORING

The salmon research and monitoring projects KRITFC coordinates and partners on comprise a significant piece of our salmon stewardship. In 2022, our team worked on 5 projects throughout the Kuskokwim.

COMMUNITY-BASED HARVEST MONITORING PROGRAM

The Community-Based Harvest Monitoring (CBHM) program hires local harvest monitors to collect anonymous, confidential harvest and effort information from fishermen in their communities after fishing opportunities. Combined with Bethel area surveys collected by Orutsararmiut Native Council and aerial surveys conducted by Yukon Delta NWR, we **use this data to create a lower river harvest estimate that directly informs our Tribal and federal in-season collaborative management team.**

Our **10 harvest monitors** surveyed **7 lower Kuskokwim communities** across 10 of 11 fishing opportunities between June 1 and July 16, 2022. From the **575 interviews** they collected, we produced **9 lower river harvest estimates**, enabling us to inform fisheries management and the public about the salmon runs, harvest quantities and qualities, and fishing effort throughout the Chinook, chum, and sockeye salmon runs.

Quyana to our 10 tireless harvest monitors for doing the hard work the CBHM program entails: James Heakin (Eek); Peter Nelson (Napakiak); Kimberly Nicholai and Wesley Nicholai (Napaskiak); Alfred Epchook, Caleb Uttereyuk, and Shane Unin (Kwethluk); Kyra Phillip (Akiachak); Melanie Phillip (Akiak); and Carl Napoka Jr. (Tuluksak). We are also grateful for our project partners at ONC and Yukon Delta NWR, as well as for the leadership of LaMont Albertson, our long-time CBHM Program Manager.

TAKOTNA RIVER WEIR

The Takotna River weir provides the **only long-term salmon escapement dataset in the upper Kuskokwim watershed** and is the **only completely community-run weir in the state of Alaska**, engaging our headwaters communities in fisheries monitoring. KRITFC operated the Takotna River weir from **July 10 to September 10, 2022**. Our crew battled high water conditions throughout most of the season, which prevented substantial fish counts. The salmon they could count totaled an estimated **164 Chinook salmon, 630 chum salmon, and 0 coho salmon**—three poor, below-average runs, especially for coho salmon, which showed an unprecedentedly low return.

Tsen’ahn, Quyana to our project partners at Takotna Tribal Council, Nikolai Edzeno’ Tribal Council, and Alaska Department of Fish & Game for their support. A huge thank you to our weir crew for their hard work throughout the season: Robert Perkins, Alfred Perkins, John Linderman, Mike Dopler, Dan Dopler, Joseph Dopler, and Richard Watcher of Takotna; and Jerad Vanderpool of McGrath.

- 10** CBHM Harvest Monitors
- 575** Harvest surveys collected in the lower Kuskokwim
- RECORD LOW** coho returns at the Takotna
- CBHM 2022** KRITFC
- Takotna Weir** Kevin Whitworth/KRITFC

KWETHLUK RIVER SMOLT OUTMIGRATION

The Kwethluk River smolt outmigration study **identifies and counts juvenile salmon smolt as they leave the Kwethluk River in the early summer**. Modeled after a similar outmigration study performed on the Kwethluk River from 2015–2018, this project recognizes a critical need to track the productivity of the Kwethluk by estimating how many adult spawners enter and juvenile smolt exit this tributary. This project also collects environmental data to explore connections between environmental conditions, like water temperature and level, and salmon abundance.

This project began with the **installation of the screw trap on April 24 and operated until mid-June**, when Chinook salmon spawners entered the system and signaled a transition to the Kwethluk River weir project.

Quyana to the Organized Village of Kwethluk for partnering on staffing our crew, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for leading project operations, and the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative for providing funding and technical support. Quyana, Tsen'ahn, Thank you to our tireless crew: Timothy Michael, Evan Waska, Ozzie Rivers, Raymond Egoak, Justin Guy of Kwethluk; Patrick Gregory of Tuluksak; and Jerad Vanderpool of McGrath. A special quyanaqvaa to Emmitt Nicori and Spencer Reardon with Yukon Delta NWR for stepping in as crew leads time and time again.



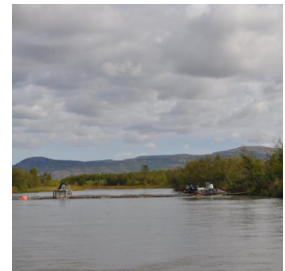
Boyd Blihovde/USFWS



Boyd Blihovde/USFWS



Terese Schomogji/KRITFC



Nikki Pollock

KWETHLUK RIVER WEIR

The Kwethluk River weir monitors **salmon spawner abundance on the second-most productive tributary in the Kuskokwim watershed** and provides essential data for creating the annual post-season, river-wide Chinook salmon run reconstruction. The Organized Village of Kwethluk hires local weir technicians, and, with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, KRITFC provides technical and leadership support.

The Kwethluk River weir operated from **June 1 to September 10, 2022**. Data collected from the weir this season documented **6,808 Chinook salmon, 2,368 chum salmon, and 8,702 coho salmon**, which met the Chinook salmon tributary escapement goal but **fell significantly short of meeting the respective chum and coho salmon goals**.

Quyana, Tsen'ahn to the local crew that worked the Kwethluk River weir this year: Timothy Michael, Evan Waska, Ozzie Rivers, Raymond Egoak, and Justin Guy of Kwethluk; Patrick Gregory of Tuluksak; and Jerad Vanderpool of McGrath. We are also indebted to our project partners; quyana, OVK and USFWS.

EDNA COLLECTION



Terese Schomogyi/KRITFC

Environmental DNA, or eDNA, collection filters **water samples to detect and analyze salmon DNA shed in river systems.** This is an innovative, relatively new, and low-cost method to estimate salmon species abundance and complement weir data, especially during high water events that hinder weir operations.

In 2022, our Kwethluk River weir partners and crew piloted this project at the Kwethluk River weir site. The crew collected **106 filtered water samples** between July 20 and September 6, 2022. At the time of this report writing, we are waiting for these samples to be analyzed by the University of Alaska-Fairbanks so we can discover if their spawner abundance estimates align with the Kwethluk River weir counts.

Quyana, Tsen’ahn to our partners at OVK, USFWS, and UAF and to the Kwethluk River weir crew for testing this project with us this season.



STRATEGIC PLANNING 2022

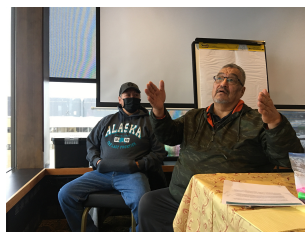
Our Elder Advisors, Executive Council, In-Season Managers, and staff gathered in February 2022 to reflect on our past and envision our future at KRITFC. Grateful for all we have accomplished in our seven years as an organization, we are hopeful for our work that is to come.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- Document Indigenous Knowledge
- Expand Fisheries Monitoring Projects
- Strengthen Partnerships

INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Decolonize KRITFC Practices
- Improve In-Season Management Process



Terese Schomogyi/KRITFC



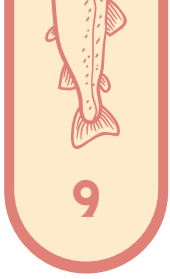
Casey Rangel/KRITFC



Casey Rangel/KRITFC



Terese Schomogyi/KRITFC



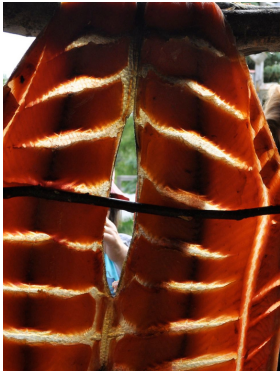
OUTREACH & ADVOCACY

KRITFC is committed to **communicating with our Kuskokwim communities** throughout the year, especially during the salmon season. As part of our in-season outreach and management, we:

- Co-hosted the **second annual Kuskokwim River Listening Session** on April 21 with Yukon Delta NWR and ADF&G to hear from the public before the salmon began their journeys upriver.
- Co-hosted a **weekly Fish Talk radio program on KYUK** in June and July, where we, Yukon Delta NWR, and ADF&G spoke with the public throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta about salmon data, our management actions, and any questions fishermen had.
- Hosted eight **weekly river-wide public teleconferences** to share and receive fishing updates, comments, and concerns with fishermen throughout the river.
- Participated in weekly public ADF&G **Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group** meetings to present on our management actions and subsistence harvest estimates.



Titiana Albrite



Beverly Hoffman



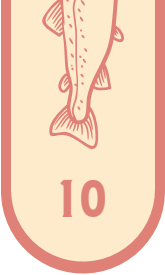
Olinka Peterson



Terese Schomogyi/KRITFC

Driven to protect our sacred, generations-long relationship with salmon, we have readily used our voices to **advocate for the health and preservation of Kuskokwim salmon and our communities' way of life**. Some of the ways we did this in 2022 included:

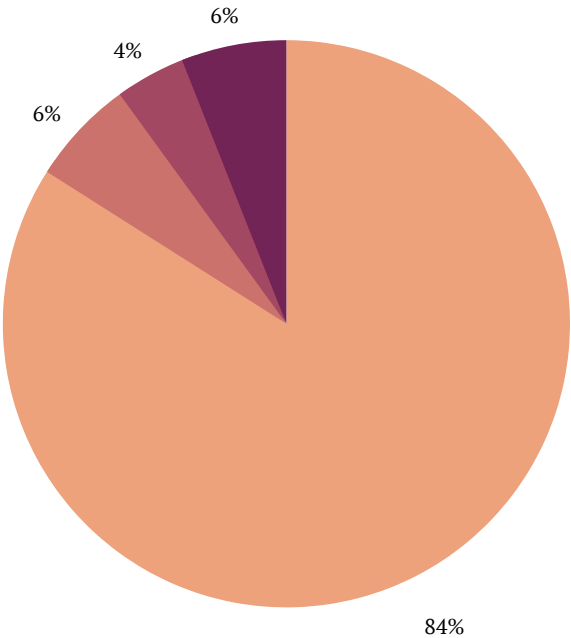
- Urging the **North Pacific Fishery Management Council** to **take action to reduce chum and Chinook salmon bycatch** in the Bering Sea–Aleutian Islands pollock trawl fishery at their June and December meetings. While the Council has so far failed to implement formal management action to reduce chum salmon bycatch, they appointed our Executive Director Kevin Whitworth and Chair Mike Williams Sr., among other Tribal leaders and industry representatives, to their **Salmon Bycatch Committee** to ideate solutions to reduce this waste and its impacts on our communities.
- Releasing our **2022 Kuskokwim River Salmon Situation Report**, which documents the multi-year Chinook, chum, and coho salmon declines on our river through Western scientific data, Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge, and community observations.
- **Meeting with Alaska Governor Dunleavy** alongside a team of Tribal leaders from the Arctic, Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Bristol Bay regions to explain the Western Alaska salmon crisis from our perspectives and appeal to their power to **halt chum salmon interception in South Alaska Peninsula (Area M) commercial fisheries**.
- Attending a **Tribal Consultation** in Bethel with the Department of the Interior and NOAA in October to discuss our salmon situation, especially related to bycatch, climate change, and our path forward to restore our salmon stocks.
- Co-facilitating the **Kusko Neqa Management Strategy Evaluation workshop** to envision scenarios about and solutions for the current and future health of Kuskokwim salmon populations.



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

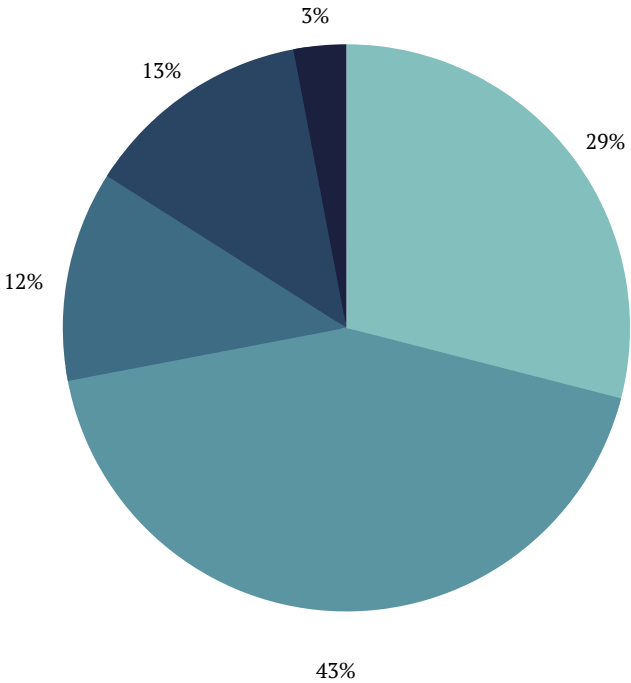
Quyana, Tsen’ahn, Thank you to our 2022 funders for making our management, research, and stewardship possible:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs: Inter-Tribal Federal Subsistence Cooperative Management Program
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service–Office of Subsistence Management: Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program
- Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association: Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative



REVENUE:
\$1,060,625.80

- 84% – BIA
- 6% – FRMP: CBHM Program
- 6% – AYK SSI: Kwethluk River Screw Trap
- 4% – FRMP: Takotna River Weir



EXPENDITURES:
\$983,479.98

- 43% – Personnel (full-time and seasonal staff)
- 29% – Contractual
- 13% – Travel
- 12% – Supplies
- 3% – Equipment

Remaining funding was rolled over to FY23.

KUSKOKWIM RIVER

INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION



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Cover photo: Breanna Simeon.