



Tuesday, June 13, 2023 @ 10:00am
Weekly River-Wide Teleconference

Join by computer: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81230332731>

Join toll-free by phone: 888-788-0099

Meeting ID: 812 3033 2731

No passcode.

Every week of the salmon season, the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) hosts a river-wide teleconference for fishermen along the Kuskokwim River to call in and discuss fishing regulations, closures and openers, fish camp updates, Traditional Knowledge, and management action. This call is held tollfree on Zoom and open to the public. In 2023, it will be held Tuesdays at 10am starting May 30 until the end of the salmon season.

Identified Participants (17 total):

- *KRITFC Staff:* Kevin Whitworth, Terese Schomogyi, Nikki Pollock, Justin Leon, Jim Simon
 - *KRITFC In-Season Managers & Council:* Paul Cleveland
 - *Yukon Delta NWR Staff:* Christian Alexie Jr., Laurie Boeck, Boyd Blihovde
 - *Public:* Karen Gillis
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- On June 12, drift/set gillnet fishing opened 24/7 from Aniak to the headwaters by ADF&G management. Also on June 12, there was a 12-hour drift/set gillnet fishing opportunity from Aniak to the mouth of the Kuskokwim by YDNWR-KRITFC management.
- In Quinhagak, been windy and rough with white caps, not too many people fishing. Reds are making their way in, and chums. Haven't seen many people hanging fish with the cool weather.
- During lower river openers, USFWS flies aerial boat and net surveys; KRITFC is collecting surveys in 10 villages; and ONC collects harvest data in Bethel. These help create harvest estimates.
- On June 12, FWS and KRITFC flew only one aerial survey in the afternoon (normally they do 2 per drift openers). There were boats out, especially in the usual busy spots in the lower river, but fewer than would have been expected. Weather was windy, rainy. Mostly big boats out to brave the waves and white caps. Likely an underestimate of fishing effort.
- One person asked if KRITFC and FWS consider the weather when setting openers, and if they would add openers if weather is poor on opener days. That is something that KRITFC and FWS consider, along with harvest estimates and other in-season data. The team will look at the 2023 harvest estimates and catch-per-unit-effort in making their next decisions.
- Set net harvests: Approximately 376 kings on June 3, 220 kings on June 6, and 1,064 kings on June 9. Also, 122 sockeye on June 9. Higher set net harvests in the lower river than usual during early June.
- Around Bethel on June 12, water seemed really high, especially because of south wind. All fish were caught on the lead line, running deep. One fisherman caught 10 salmon (including reds) and 5 sheefish

in the middle of the river. Most people catching in deep water, not in the shallows. Folks who went downriver did not catch much, came back around 1pm or 2pm.

- Water is still so high in lower river that you can boat across sandbars at high tide. High water affecting fishing in the lower river.
- Fall-time weather throughout the Kuskokwim. Rainy, windy, even in McGrath. Expect it will be hard to dry fish and many folks will want more openers.
- In McGrath, lots of rain, cool weather, tons of mosquitoes.
- Around Bethel, fishers reported being “thrashed around” during the June 12 opener, and whitefish caught were “monstrous.”
- Throughout the river, you can fish with alternative gear types: dip nets, fish wheels, beach seines, and hook and line. Below Aniak, federally qualified subsistence users can keep any fish they harvest with these gear, and non-federally qualified subsistence users can only keep sockeye. Above Aniak, fishers can keep king salmon but must release chum salmon caught with these gear.
- The 2023 Area M fishery has just started, and they have caught 2,774 chum salmon as of June 11, and over 12,000 as of June 12 at 11:00am. Many AYK fishermen asked for a 60% reduction in Area M fisheries at the Board of Fish, but the BOF only reduced the fishery by 12%.
- As of June 8, there have been about 12,000 Chinook salmon and 1,100 chum salmon caught as bycatch.
- King salmon being caught as far up as Crooked Creek; making their way upriver, trickling in.
- Folks are finding worms in fish. If you find worms or other disease in your fish, call the YDNWR Fish Info Line and leave a message at 907-543-1008; ADF&G Pathology Lab at 907-267-2244; or send a picture to aaron_moses@fws.gov, Nicholas.smith@alaska.gov, or via Messenger to KRITFC or YDNWR’s Facebook pages. To avoid getting sick from worms, make sure your fish is cooked or dried thoroughly to kill them.
- In recent years, the “Kalskag line” or region above the Kalskag bluffs has opened to fishing 24/7 around June 18-20. KRITFC and YDNWR will review in-season data to see if this is possible this year. Please keep an ear out for announcements, and otherwise, regulations above the bluffs to Aniak will be the same as throughout the Refuge.
- On the Yukon, fishers are experiencing about the same water level and weather conditions as on the Kuskokwim. Test fishery catches are about a week behind, very low, very poor. At the Pilot Station sonar, Chinook passage is about 1,000 fish, or less than 15% of the historical average. They have not counted any summer chum yet, but historically by this time have counted at least 20,000 summer chum.
- High water around Aniak coming down and stabilizing.
- KRITFC Project Updates: Kwethluk screw trap is running, adding to project that FWS did from 2015-18. Kwethluk weir is starting to get installed. Takotna weir is hiring crew and aiming for an first operation date of July 1. The Community-Based Harvest Monitoring program has hired 13 people across 10 lower Kuskokwim communities to collect in-season salmon harvest data. Alternative ways to collect spawner info, like environmental DNA (eDNA) collection and drone spawner surveys, will launch soon up some of the tributaries.
- At the Kwethluk screw trap from late May to early June, the crew saw more smolt coming down with higher water. About 200 cohos/day and 100 Chinook/day with high water. Fewer smolt moving with low water.
- On June 12, waves around Tuntutuliak and Eek were about 5-6 feet tall. People with Lunds couldn’t get out.
- On June 14, the ADFG Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group meeting will start at 10am. In the afternoon, KRITFC and YDNWR will meet to go through data and discuss future lower Kuskokwim harvest opportunities.

- In Chuathbaluk, a few set nets out are only catching whitefish, no kings yet as of this morning. People upriver of Chuathbaluk have caught kings while drifting. Can be hard to find places to set nets around the community. Water is still high. Don't want the river closed to fishing like last year during silver season.
- Encourage folks upriver of Aniak to call into the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group meetings on Wednesday to share concerns and feedback with ADFG: 1-800-315-6338, Meeting Code: 58756# (KUSKO#).
- The language in Federal and state regulations and gear restrictions can be confusing. KRITFC working to make those clearer and get posts out on Facebook. Can also call the YDNWR Fish Info Line at 907-543-1008 to hear the latest regulations downriver of Aniak; or the ADFG Bethel Office line at 907-543-2433 to hear the latest regulations upriver of Aniak. Both lines have recordings with the latest regulations, or you can leave a message and get a call back.
- People still upset about the coho salmon closure last year, and ADFG saying they didn't have the "tools in the toolbox" to allow fishing for whitefish with a 4" during August and September.
- In Quinhagak, ADFG coming today for a meeting to discuss commercial and subsistence fishing in Togiak NWR.
- In Akiachak, YDNWR meeting with the Tribe today to discuss fish.
- Call KRITFC Executive Director, Kevin Whitworth, at 907-574-0388 with any questions or concerns.