



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 (13 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, Christopher Tulik
 - *Public:* Karen Gillis, Dan Gillikin, Adolph Lupie
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- On 6/19, the Federal/Tribal in-season management team announced several 6” mesh gillnet openers: the Kalskag Line opener from the bluffs to the Aniak Box (starts 6/20 at 12:00pm until further notice), drift/set opportunity (6/23 from 7:00am–7:00pm).
- Drift and set netting is open above Aniak to the headwaters 24/7 until further notice per ADFG regulations. Subsistence users can keep any king salmon caught with alternative gear, except in the Aniak Box.
- In McGrath, fishermen are catching bright, orange-fleshed, big kings in set nets, as well as whitefish. People are happy.
- In Nikolai, some people have gone up to Salmon River to get camps ready, and some are fishing at Blackwater, but no fish have been caught yet. Salmon River fishing picks up around July 4, but the first king was caught in Blackwater on June 7 several years ago.
- In Bethel and the lower Kuskokwim, hearing happy reports from the 12-hour 6/17 drift and set net opener. The weather was good and people harvested good amounts of fish. Anonymous harvest surveys produced a harvest estimate for 6/17: Approximately 10,500 kings, 3,000 chum salmon, and 6,000 sockeye salmon were harvested between Tuntutuliak and Tuluksak.
- This was the highest king harvest on the June 17 day since in-season harvest estimation began in 2016, and the chum harvest was better than this point in time in 2021 and 2022. Meanwhile, Bethel sonar and BTF are showing a poor-to-medium run at this point in the season, tracking some of the lowest years on record (2012 and 2013). Uncertainty why harvests are showing a strong run, but sonar and BTF show a poor run.

- One caller asked about effort and catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) on 6/17. The CPUE on 6/17/23 was one of the highest relative to other years of in-season harvest estimation with about 21 kings/boat trip. Total estimated harvest to-date in 2023 is about 13,000, which is similar to previous years.
- In the lower Kuskokwim, Federally qualified subsistence users can fish with gillnets at any time in non-spawning tributaries, and can fish with alternative gear types (dipnets, beach seines, rod and reel, and fish wheels) 24/7 at any point and keep all salmon.
- KRITFC has heard good reports fishing for sockeye salmon with dipnets, which can be done at any point regardless of gillnet closures.
- Federally qualified subsistence users are people who have permanently resided in a Kuskokwim drainage community for at least 1 year. Non-FQSUs, like family in Anchorage or on the Yukon, can help with fish camp activities like cutting, smoking, and sharing, but cannot legally drive boat or pull net or participate in the fishing according to federal regulations.
- In Tuntutuliak, people are doing well, despite being worried before the openers were announced. On 6/17, people were giving thanks to God because their fish racks were filling up. Support for Friday openers that allow people to rest on Sunday.
- This week and next week, fish will be coming upriver from the mouth, because they were abundant around the mouth of the river.
- Around Eek, some people from the coast and Tuntutuliak were fishing around the Eek River instead of the Pailleq. The Eek River is closed to fishing because it is a spawning tributary. One caller asked for more enforcement and clarification, and asked that Kongiganak and Kwigillingok pass resolutions to join KRITFC and vote on issues.
- Coastal fishermen can fish the mainstem Kuskokwim River during federal openers, or in the Kuskokwim Bay except on Sundays or with more than one 300-foot, 6” mesh net.
- One caller observed more effort on 6/17 than previous openers, especially more boats headed downriver. They also noticed higher chum catches as the tide went out in the morning, and more kings after slack tide in the afternoon. A Quinhagak fisherman also noticed more chums than Chinook caught. This caller also noticed fish slipped out of their 6” gear, likely sockeye or big chums.
- In-season managers evaluate many factors like time of day, tides, weather, harvests, in-season data, Indigenous Knowledge and observations, and getting spawners to the headwaters as they balance conservation and harvest.
- Mosquitoes are increasing especially as the weather is warm. There will be more salmon swimming.
- Another natural indicator is the songbirds. In McGrath, the day the swallows arrive, the first mosquitoes hatch. Then, when the second, smaller, faster round of mosquitoes come out, the flycatchers arrived. Lots of mosquitoes in McGrath now.
- Other natural indicators in the headwaters include yellow butterflies and cottonwood flying as signs that king salmon are here.
- As of last Thursday 6/15, Bering Sea Chinook bycatch is at almost 13,000 fish, and chum bycatch is at about 1,300 fish. We expect chum salmon bycatch to rise as the fleet is now in the B-season.
- As of 6/17, there were just over 77,000 chum salmon intercepted in Area M – a huge jump up from the previous week. The daily catch on 6/17 itself was over 34,000 chums. These are a minimum estimate, in part because of chum-chucking that is occurring to this day; one seiner was caught and summoned to court on 6/15 for doing this, and anecdotally, fishermen around the state know about this issue. ADFG claims that chum-chucking has been resolved.
- There has been at least one citation on the Kuskokwim for someone fishing in the wrong location.
- One caller is glad that KRITFC has a biologist and makes an effort to gather data, including Traditional Knowledge, and particularly to use the data to show that we are suffering because of Area M and other factors.

- The Kwethluk River screw trap to count juvenile salmon finalized operations on 6/14, and the Kwethluk weir to count spawners is being installed this week.
- The Takotna River weir is the only long-term headwaters salmon assessment, and is underway to be crewed and installed by July 1.
- eDNA collection will hopefully be collected at the Kwethluk, George, and Takotna river weirs to explore alternative, more cost-effective and flexible ways to monitor spawner abundance.
- In late July, KRITFC will start a drone-based spawner abundance feasibility project as another alternative way to monitor salmon and train local people and students to become drone pilots.
- KRITFC is also investigating a sockeye salmon dipnet study to find the best places and techniques to fish with dipnets and promote the use of dipnets.
- We are now entering the multi-species salmon management period, where kings, chums, and sockeye are running at the same time, making management complicated and conservation, important.
- A caller asked about a channel above Eek Island and if it is open as part of Pailleq Slough, or closed as part of Eek River. [Discussion after the call confirmed it is closed; see in red on map below.]
- We will be back next week, and on KYUK Fish Talk, every Thursday of the salmon season from 1:00-2:30pm.

