



**Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Weekly River-Wide Teleconference
Monday, May 17, 2021 | 10am AKDT**

Join by computer: <https://zoom.us/j/5694903415>

Join toll-free by phone: 833-548-0282

Meeting ID: 569 490 3415

About:

Every Monday of king 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 toll-free on Zoom and open to the public. In 2021, it will be held Mondays at 10am from May 17 to July 12.

Hosts on this call:

Mary Peltola, Executive Director of KRITFC

Boyd Blihovde, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager

People on this call: 12

Summary:

- The Federal waters of the Kuskokwim (from the mouth to Aniak) will be closed to all salmon fishing using gillnets on June 1, 2021. Set net opportunities for Federal Qualified Subsistence Users during the front-end closure (June 1-11) will be June 2, 5, and 9, all from 6:00am to 10:00pm. Drift or set net opportunities will be June 12 and 15 from 6:00am to 6:00pm. Nets must be 6 inches or smaller.
- The State waters of the Kuskokwim will be closed beginning June 9 (Section 4 – from Aniak to the ADF&G Holitna River regulatory markers) and June 11 (Section 5 – from the ADF&G Holitna River regulatory markers to the headwaters).
- The ice is out in the lower and upper river.
- KYUK will be hosting Fish Talk on Thursdays at 1pm.
- The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge will have a small law enforcement presence this year. They will be helping to ensure that only Federally Qualified Subsistence Users have access to fishing in Federal waters.
- The 2021 ONC harvest surveyors are Avery Hoffman, Delen Hooper, Deja Jackson, and Jaden Andrew. Community-Based Harvest Monitoring program monitors will be working in other lower river villages.

Full Notes:

- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Welcome to the first 2021 Monday morning river-wide call-in! The Fish Commission and the Refuge have done these for the last 3 years in order to help reduce confusion and solicit Traditional Knowledge. Boyd Blihovde is the co-host, and he's online as well. Again, these meetings don't have an agenda, but we usually start with an update on what the status is on jurisdictions on the river. As most of you all know, this year, 2021, the Federal waters have been federalized starting June 1 under the authority that Boyd has at the Refuge. Starting June 1 and going on for an undetermined amount of time, the Refuge will be managing the Federal waters. From Aniak and above, that is State jurisdiction, that will be managed by the State. At the Working Group meeting on May 3-4, the Working Group decided to begin the rolling closures in State waters on June 11 and I want to say the 13, but I'm not exactly sure, in Sections 4-5. Boyd, do you want to add anything at this point?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** Good morning. I just want to say hi. I feel like every week is like my first week on the job all over again because I've never participated in these catch-up calls, but I'm looking forward to it. I would definitely add more info in during the call, if you would like.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I think it's worth sharing that for the period that we refer to as the "front-end closure," this year it will be June 1-11. There have been announced 3 set net opportunities; those are on Wednesday, Saturday, and Wednesday, so June 2, 5, and 9. The Refuge is opening waters to set nets with 6-inch gear or smaller. That will go from 6am to 10pm. The Refuge has also announced drift and set net openings on June 12 from 6am to 6pm and June 15 from 6am to 6pm. Those are the openings in Federal waters. We've also heard from KYUK that they will be resuming Fish Talk. I think it will be Thursdays at 1pm.
- **Anna Rose MacArthur – KYUK:** Yes, that's correct, Mary.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Thank you. This really is a forum to get information out about when the river is closed and open, and to get feedback from fishermen. Traditional Knowledge is always welcome. With that, I'd like to open up the floor to any questions or sharing.
- **Ralph Nelson – Napakiak:** Could you mention those dates again? June 2, 5, and 9?
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Yes. The set net is 6am to 10pm. It's 16 hours. It was to make sure if somebody had a 9 to 5 job, they'd have enough time to go and pull their net. Also, to make sure people get an incoming tide on their set.
- **Ralph Nelson – Napakiak:** Yes, that would work great. Last year, there were both openings on the same tide, and some people were talking about how where they drift, they were setting nets, and some nets were in the way out for some people.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Okay. That might be another issue on June 12 and 15. Those are the drifting dates. Hopefully people can resolve it at their fishing site to talk to the person with the set net to see if they might be willing relocate during the drifting times.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Good morning, Mary, this is Kevin. I just wanted to let you know I'm on the phone, and let other folks know. I'm here for anybody if they have questions about projects or some of the data. I'm the Fish Commission fish biologist, that's all.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** I have the State rolling closures here if you want me to read that out. Section 4 is beginning at 12:01am on Wednesday, June 9. That is from the Yukon Delta boundary near Aniak to the ADF&G regulatory markers near the Holitna River mouth. Section 5 begins 12:01am on Friday, June 11, upstream of the ADF&G regulatory markers near the Holitna River mouth to the headwaters of the Kuskokwim River.

- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I see Adolph Lupie on the call. Adolph, is the ice out downriver?
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** Good morning, Mary. The river opened yesterday. There are ice floes flowing, but we could go out from Tuntutuliak to the Kuskokwim River. The lakes upriver, they're still frozen.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Do you know if that barge was able to get into the Kuskokwim?
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** Yeah, the barge could come in. It's open right now, all the way from the mouth of the river to Bethel.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Okay, that is really good news! Do you have any Traditional Knowledge you want to share?
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** When we had a meeting last time, ADF&G wanted USFWS to have the more enforced regulations. I think USFWS didn't do too much enforcing the fish regulations, and they weren't happy with that. But me, myself, and I, I was content about it last year, with the enforcement. That's all. I think these regulations, using the right method of fishing means.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Qu yana, Adolph. Boyd, do you want to talk about your plan for law enforcement this year?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** Yes, thank you Mr. Lupie and Mary. I can tell you that we plan to have law enforcement here, but I think I'm sensing from Mr. Lupie's comments that he was content with not a large presence being here last year. I know that in previous years, USFWS had 18 to 20 officers here at a time. It was viewed as an army of folks here. I don't advocate for that. I believe we need to have a presence here because we need to show that we care about this issue just like you all do. I have encouraged to have law enforcement here, but to have a small presence, not necessarily a large number. There's going to be an estimated 2 to 3 officers here at a time. We've got boats being prepared to get out of the ice and into the water so we can run them. That's the update so far. I hope that, more than anything, officers can be there to make sure folks understand the closures and the rules and help the local community out if there's any confusion over the regs because they can be confusing. I'm still learning them, too.
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** Good morning, Kevin. This year, I found out that something is always happening to wildlife. When I told them that swallows came – I saw swallows flying out here – they said to me upriver got no more ice, up there in McGrath. I believed them because during when the swallows came, somebody mentioned there was no more ice up there. Good morning.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** I have a question for those that have a lot of experience in Traditional Knowledge. I'm halfway joking here, but what does it mean when it snows on May 17 in Bethel?
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** This is for USFWS. The wild geese, all the birds you're conserving, they're laying eggs today, in the wetlands.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** That's good. I'm glad that the snow didn't scare the geese off.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** This being the first call, and people not really being ready to go fishing – like the law enforcement, we're all getting our boats ready for the summer, getting the lower unit oil changed and all that – I'm glad that we were able to have this call in case there were any serious questions before law enforcement on the river. It's a good habit for us to get into before June 1. We'll have a couple more Mondays to go. KYUK, do you have any questions, or anyone on the phone have any questions or comments?

- **Anna Rose MacArthur – KYUK:** I have questions, but I can ask them during Fish Talk on Thursday. Thank you.
- **LaMont Albertson – KRITFC/BSFA:** I wanted to mention that from Napaskiak, Emmitt Nicori is going to help us out this year, which we really appreciate, to the Community-Based Harvest Monitoring program. Also, Brionna Pavila from Tuntutuliak. They've been helping us out for the past 3 or 4 years, so they're going to continue. We're still working a little bit on upriver, and on Napaskiak to help Emmitt out. We're looking forward to the season. And earlier, to Boyd's question about the snow on May 17, I know one thing that does mean: That you should wear more clothes when you go outside this morning. One other question for Boyd: I know the CDC has lifted their guidelines for other areas. I'm wondering when they will lift them over at USFWS also.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** I can give an update on that. We have one Refuge Manager who started a petition around to other managers for a call to return to normal, because in most cases, the Refuge staff have been vaccinated across Alaska. We have a plan to open up our Visitor's Center and Visitor's Services at the Refuge, and to start some community outreach, face-to-face programs with the public, that we're hoping to get approved. We hope that we can go back to very close to normal fairly soon because of the vaccinations. I'm really impressed with the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta; the vaccination rate that's occurred here has been impressive. That's our hope.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** So, Boyd, when we have our meetings, those are going to be on Zoom to start out with?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** To start out with. That's one thing they've been really cautious about, is any meetings, because technology is here where we can do these Zoom calls and everything. But gosh, it sure would be nice to get back to where we're sitting around in a circle looking at each other face-to-face.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Great. And thank you very much, LaMont, for your updates on the CBHM program. That is going to happen at least in Akiak, Kwethluk, Napaskiak, Napakiak, and Tuntutuliak. Was it 5 this summer, LaMont?
- **LaMont Albertson – KRITFC/BSFA:** Yes. We are hoping to get some information from Akiachak also.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Good, so possibly 6. That's great. And then ONC will also be doing the Bethel area fish camps and boat harbor, so that's great. Boyd's crew will be doing aerial surveys to get counts of fishermen and nets, which will also help in our estimation of harvest.
- **LaMont Albertson – KRITFC/BSFA:** Yes. And also, one thing that popped our gears gone by: should that your enforcement officers have Boyd work the bow and arrow classes, they had them in different communities, I don't know, do you have personnel this summer with your holing down efforts to enforce that or not? If we could have those same classes again at some point, I'm sure it would help us out a lot.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** Yes, sir. We have one community – I believe it's Aniak or Akiak, one of the two – is talking to an officer now trying to have a course in the near future. When the officers are here, I would encourage that we can have some informal courses go on in this summer season. I really like those programs.
- **Katie Russell – ONC:** This is Katie from ONC. I just wanted to say that I'm listening in, and that's about it for this morning. If anyone has questions, I'm happy to answer as well. Danielle Lowrey is also here with me and we can answer any questions if needed. Thank you!
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Can you guys tell us who your hires are for doing the harvest surveys this summer, for ONC?

- **Katie Russell – ONC:** Yes. We have 4 technicians who will be starting with us next week, or who have already started. We will have Avery Hoffman, who will be working with ONC again, Delen Hooper, Deja Jackson, and Jaden Andrew. The first three are from Bethel, and Jaden Andrew is from Nunapitchuk. They are all in college or going to be in college, so they're all students. They're all Native hires as well, so we're excited about that.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** I just want to comment that I know there's been some calls to the Refuge already with some concern over the confusion that has been created based on the State's press release that indicated the same set net opportunities that we've agreed to here locally. I just want to assure everyone that we're going to be working on some further press releases from the USFWS side that will help to hopefully clarify that it's our intention to have the river closed to all but Federal Qualified Subsistence Users. That is what we're intending to enforce locally with our USFWS officers. We are afraid that folks may get confused and see other press releases and think that, "Okay, now, I'm needing to come out to the Kuskokwim River, I want to fish." The openers that Mary talked about are only open to those that are local, qualified users. I just want to assure everyone that we're going to be trying to get some press out there, some flyers and things on social media so that everyone can be aware of the rules.
- **Anna Rose MacArthur – KYUK:** I have a follow-up to that. This is something I'm trying to figure out, with the State declaring concurrent openings as the Feds have declared openings. You said that the intent is to limit it. Does that mean that, legally, only local subsistence users will be allowed to use gillnets in Federalized waters? Or you're just going to try to message only for local subsistence users to use that gear?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** I appreciate that follow-up. It will be enforced that the only folks that should be here fishing are the local qualified users. That's what we're going to enforce from the USFWS side. The issue is that we're trying to prevent folks coming here under confusion by getting the word out here as much as we can.
- **LaMont Albertson – KRITFC/BSFA:** To let everybody know, our community-based monitors are going to be working during the set net openings. Thank you.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Yeah, the set net opportunities are a really good practice run for the community-based monitors to get their systems down. They have software on their smart phones that they use. Since a lot fewer fishermen are out during the set net times, it's a good training for the CBHM surveyors. Boyd, thank you for that clarification on enforcement, and clarifying the rules as well as enforcing them. Anna Rose, another big difference this year is that the Feds have declared management over all three species of salmon that are running at the same time. One of the reasons I think it's important for us to have this forum is so people can ask questions about what is legal and what is not legal to make sure they're in compliance, and then help spread the word. I apologize for this being on Zoom. I know there are a lot more numbers to plug in, but thank you for doing that. This year, both the Federal Subsistence Board and the Board of Fish heard loud and clear the discontent about using 4-inch gear. The regulations do say 6-inch or smaller gear is legal for set net and drift net. That's good news.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** Mary, these teleconferences are going to be recurring every Monday? And it's 10am to 12pm, but just like this one, if you run out of anything to talk about, it's just going to be shortened up?
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Yeah, and they hardly ever go very long. They're usually in the half-hour time frame. When it gets to June 1, they tend to last more like an hour. Especially when the State waters become closed and opened, there are a lot more State waters folks calling in. Hopefully ADF&G will be

joining us. We'll be working on that in the weeks to come. I just want to thank everybody for dialing in, and we'll be talking to you more on Monday mornings throughout the summer until the kings have passed. Thanks, everybody!

- **Ralph Nelson – Napakiak:** Mary, I may need your cell phone on days when I might want to call you.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Absolutely! Good point. My cell number is 907-545-6206. I take calls, I text, I use email, however you prefer to communicate. I'm standing by.