



**Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission  
Weekly River-Wide Teleconference  
Monday, May 24, 2021 | 10am AKDT**

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

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

**Meeting ID:** 569 490 3415

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**About:**

Every Monday of king salmon season, the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) and Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR) co-host 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.

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**Hosts on this call:**

Mary Peltola, Executive Director of KRITFC

Boyd Blihovde, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager

**People on this call: 9**

**Summary:**

- The salmon fishery in the Federal waters of the Kuskokwim River will be federalized this year on June 1. Three set net opportunities will be June 2, 5, and 9 from 6:00am to 10:00pm. Two drift gillnet opportunities will be June 12 and 15 from 6:00am to 6:00pm.
- Fishing in Unit 4 of State waters will be closed beginning June 9, and Unit 5 will close beginning June 11.
- The water is going down quickly in McGrath, and there was a lightning caused forest fire in the headwaters recently. The Bethel area is seeing high water, smelt, and mosquitoes.
- KRITFC and ONC are preparing for in-season community-based harvest monitoring with a training this week.
- Law enforcement will arrive at the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge this weekend, and the Refuge is preparing for their aerial overflights during set net opportunities.

**Full Notes:**

- **Mary Peltola:** Good morning. I don't imagine that these early meetings are going to be well attended. I was surprised on Friday on KYUK's Talk Line was burning up with people wanting to talk about fishing,

but I think people pretty broadly understand that it's going to be federalized and there's going to be 3 set net opportunities and, so far, 2 drift net opportunities, and hopefully more announcements to come. I guess smelts are the headliner today!

- **Boyd Blihovde:** Aaron Moses was telling me that once the smelts arrive, then people start to get worked up because the fish are coming, and salmon are expected. Maybe people will start to get more excited now about fishing after this call.
- **Mary Peltola:** Yeah, and the next call is on Memorial Day, but I host it anyway because usually people have fishing on their mind. We'll just do a quick overview. The salmon fishery is going to be federalized on June 1. Three set net opportunities will be held during the front-end closure from June 1 to 11 on a Wednesday, Saturday, and Wednesday – June 2, 5, and 9 – from 6:00am to 10:00pm with 6-inch gear or less. Those are set net opportunities. There are 2 drift net opportunities in Federal waters announced for June 12 and June 15 from 6:00am to 6:00pm. That's a Saturday and a Tuesday. If you have any questions, we're happy to answer questions.
- **Kevin Whitworth:** The State waters closures are: Unit 4, which is above Aniak up to the Holitna River, closes June 9, and Unit 5, above the Holitna up to the headwaters, closes June 11. Last year, I know Unit 5 at least was closed for the one day; I don't know about Unit 4. I think it lasted a little bit longer. And just really quick, I was just thinking about the river conditions here in McGrath, and I can share a quick update. We had a lot of snow this winter, and after breakup the water has been steadily coming down. The sandbars are finally starting to show. There's lots of mud because everything is starting to appear. Just this weekend, in a 24-hour period, it must have come down a foot. Somebody called me and said, "Kevin, I think you need to push your boat out, the water's coming down a lot." I was really thankful for that guy who called me up and told me to push my boat out. I'm really surprised how fast the water has come down. I was expecting a little more water. Maybe there's still some water being held up in the mountains, like the Alaska Range, and once the glaciers start to melt and warm up more, it'll come up. Right now, it's just coming down a lot.
- **Mary Peltola:** That's interesting to know. It sounds like somebody came to tell you the tide's coming out, way up at the headwaters! The water is really high down here in Bethel, and I don't know if it was because we were out at high tide, but it is very high water here. Sometimes it lowers and rises again, and it seems to have a lot to do with your weather up there, Kevin.
- **Kevin Whitworth:** Yes, and I think the weather has played a big part in this drying up. We had a spring that has been just perfect for drying up. It's been intense sun, a little bit of wind, and everything is evaporating so quickly instead of going into the rivers and creeks. Everybody in McGrath has been surprised how fast everything has dried. We had our first forest fire 10 days ago about. It was a lightning caused forest fire. Memorial Day weekend is normally when it starts, so this is pretty early for lightning caused.
- **Mary Peltola:** It's been cold down here. We've had a cold spell with a number of cold, windy days. This weekend got warm and sunny, but once the sun went down it sure got cold. We still have some things frozen to the ground in some spots down here, so it's not quite summer yet. I am seeing a lot of mosquitoes, though, and it makes me think there must be kings in the river. That's what people from Tuntutuliak say: mosquitos equals king salmon. Just so Janessa Esquible and Boyd and others on the call know, the community-based harvest monitors and ONC employees are going to do training this week. LaMont Albertson, Terese Schomogyi, and Bill Bechtol will be here. Joe Spaeder will connect over videoconference. Most of the village-based harvest monitors are coming in to be trained for age, sex, and length data collection and the app that they use to record the numbers. That training is

happening on Wednesday. We're prepping for that. Casey Rangel from our Anchorage office is coming out today. We're just looking forward to working with a great village-based crew again. That's one of our updates.

- **Janessa Esquible:** I'll be back in town next Tuesday, so I won't be in person, but I'll be on the training by Zoom. Hopefully it'll go well; it sounds like it will. I'm excited that people can gather face to face safely. That's really awesome.
- **Boyd Blihovde:** We're anticipating our law enforcement folks getting here this weekend, so by the time we have our next call, they will definitely be out and starting to get oriented again to being here locally. The first is right after that next call, after Memorial Day. They will be out on boats, just a couple of folks. Because it's just set net opportunities, we don't think it'll be too busy, but Aaron Moses has been scheduling our flights to go and monitor for how many nets are out. We're excited about starting that up on the 2.
- **Aaron Moses:** For the set net, it's just one flight per opening. During the gillnets on the 12 and 15, it'll be twice.
- **Boyd Blihovde:** Thanks, Aaron. We've been planning for that kind of stuff and getting prepared. So far, we're still in the preparation phase, just making sure we're ready.
- **Mary Peltola:** Also, Boyd and Aaron and I have been going to KYUK. We went last week for Fish Talk. They're planning on that being an every week program on Thursdays from 1-2:30pm. It's a call-in program. We filled the entire hour and a half program on Thursday. Luckily, Sam Berlin from Kasigluk was there doing the interpreting on that. Those are all the updates I can think of. Thanks everyone for calling in!