

**Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Weekly River-Wide Teleconference
Monday, June 13, 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) 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.

Hosts on this call:

Mary Peltola, Executive Director of KRITFC

Boyd Blihovde, Manager of Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

People on this call: 12

Summary:

- At the June 12 fishing opportunity, the estimated drift trip effort was 381 total drift net trips. An estimated 3,640 total salmon were harvested by drift net: 3,220 Chinook, 70 chums, and 340 sockeye. An estimated 150 total salmon were harvested by set net, and 80% were Chinook.
- ONC's surveys recorded an average harvest of 5.9 Chinook salmon for fishers from the Bethel boat harbor and 7.8 Chinook salmon at Bethel area fish camps.
- Chinook salmon harvest so far in 2021 is better than 2017, about the same as 2020, and not as good as 2019.
- Law enforcement presence from USFWS is on the river. They say that, in general, people are taking conservation and using 6-inch gear seriously.
- During the drift opportunities, including the upcoming June 15 opportunity, fishers can use 300-foot gear below the Johnson River and 150-foot gear above it. If a fisher is not fishing their full net, it *is* legal to tie up the part of their net not being used.
- KRITFC In-Season Managers and YDNWR staff will meet Thursday, June 17, to look over June 15 harvest data and decide whether or not another fishing opportunity can take place.
- Good luck to all fishermen and women, and let's pray for more fish!

Full Notes:

- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Good morning, everyone. We had a harvest opportunity from 6:00am to 6:00pm on Saturday, June 12. There is another announced subsistence opportunity on Tuesday, June 15, again from 6:00am to 6:00pm using 6-inch gear. I did have a couple people call a little bit confused

thinking perhaps the fishing period was going until 10:00pm just because that was the time frame during the set net opportunities during the front-end closure. Everyone I saw was coming back in at 6:00pm, and that confusion was cleared up pretty quickly. What I noticed is that folks that went out at 6:00am did much better, no surprise there. For data collection, there were 121 interviews conducted at the Bethel boat harbor by ONC. KRITFC/BSFA community-based harvest monitors conducted 76 interviews. ONC's Bethel area fish camps were 29, for a total of 226 interviews. For the aerial surveys, 2 flights were made, and they counted 274 drift nets on the first count and 250 on the second count. Those were conducted at 9:17am and 3:00pm. They saw 19 set nets the first time and 24 set nets the second time. An estimate of the effort is an estimated 381 total drift trips. An estimated 64% of the trips that were counted on flight 2 were also counted on flight 1. An estimated 18 trips were not counted during any flight. An estimated 24 total set net trips occurred. The harvest estimate is an estimated total of 3,640 salmon were harvested, and an estimated total of 3,220 Chinook salmon were harvested. For chums, it's an estimate of 70; and reds, the estimate is 340. Harvest by set net accounted for an estimated 150 total salmon: 80% king, 7% chum and 13% reds. Do we have any questions?

- **Christopher Tulik – USFWS/YDNWR:** How's the harvest effort compared to last year's opener at this first drift net opportunity? Is there more this year or about the same?
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I don't have that information in front of me. Do we know if Kevin Whitworth or Spencer Reardon are on the phone?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** I talked to Aaron Moses yesterday afternoon, and he said it was similar to last year, and even the last few years with harvest, but a bit low. He said 2019 was an outlier year, but compared to the other years, it's pretty similar.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** I had some telephone issues, but I'm here with Spencer Reardon at USFWS. Right around 3,400 total salmon were harvested; 3,200 Chinook salmon, 70 chum salmon, and 340 sockeye salmon. That's with the drift net fishery. Set nets harvested an estimated 150 salmon. I could get into harvest estimates per section, but I'll just stop there. Chris had a question about how June 12 harvest compares to other years. We've been running this project for about 5 years. We have data from 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 for the June 12 opener. This is looking about like last year's, about the 2020 harvest. It's a little bit better than the 2017 harvest and not as good as the 2019, which was a better year as far as harvest goes. It's still really early in the year, and you can't jump to conclusions with the data, but that's what we're looking at.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/KRITFC:** I'll just add that I did the afternoon survey, and the pilot and I both commented that there were a lot of boats that we couldn't count as fishing, but it was clear that they'd just pulled in their nets or were on their way back to a boat harbor. You mentioned some unaccounted-for harvesters, and I think that is part of that. Some people, from what Aaron was saying, didn't catch fish all day, they just weren't in the right spot, and maybe they just called it quits early. Just wanted to add that it was really obvious that by 3:00pm there were a lot of people heading in.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Yeah, my fishing experience was that we went out around 11:30am because I was looking at the tide book. We ended up catching 2 fish altogether, one in each of our two last drifts. It was very slow. Somebody parked next to us at the boat harbor said he got skunked all morning, and then at the end of the day, he caught 3. But a lot of dry hauls – and a lot of competition. Around the favorite fishing spots near Bethel, like around Joe Pete's and Schwalbe and the Gweek, there was a lot of competition. And the boat harbor was absolutely packed in Bethel.

- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/KRITFC:** Just a comment on how packed it was: I agree that a lot of people went down to the Johnson River and past the Johnson to where you could use a longer net. That was really evident from the air. Around Napaskiak, there were a bunch of boats and it was really congested. If you went even a half mile south of the Johnson, there were virtually no boats; it was just wide open. They really had it to themselves. It was interesting that for some reason people really liked the area around Napaskiak, and it was obvious why they would go to the top of the Johnson.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Yeah, I agree, Boyd. There's some pinch points in the river that people are really attracted to because the effort is so much less when you're fishing in a narrow spot. Definitely those choke points down there get congested. For people not from downriver, it's early in the season, and we're not quite sure where the channel is.
- **Christopher Tulik – USFWS/YDNWR:** We went out just after 6:00am, and we set sometime after 6:15am, 6:20am, somewhere around there. I thought we were going to do good because when we were setting we caught 1 king. That was the only king that we caught down there, between Bethel and Oscarville. There weren't that many boats at that time, but there were more and more boats showing up. It got kind of crowded. We went to that spot that's my son's favorite area. He wanted to move further up by Schwalbe Island. We got 2 more up there. We also got sheefish, burbot, pike, humpback whitefish. I was really happy to get those. But things got really slow and we weren't catching anymore fish after noon, so we went back after nearly 6 hours of fishing.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** You did really well! We saw your boat there at your fish camp, so I figured you were out there. Does anyone else have a fishing report?
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** On Saturday, the fishing from the Kuskokwim opened, and we all wanted to go down there. We observed traditional values and culture. We had a funeral, so nobody went out until the body was laid. There were a few fishermen who went out and they did well. This week, I want to fish the best I can so I can fill my fish racks. We haven't been out fishing yet. There will be more subsistence fishermen going out this week, hopefully, if the weather's good. The fish are swimming down there, king salmon and a few chums and reds. Good morning.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Thank you for that information. Hopefully by Tuesday people from Tunt can go fishing. Do you have any Traditional Knowledge you want to share, Adolph?
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** Yes. One of the fishermen that went to check his whitefish net up there last week, he got lots of whitefish besides pike. When he came back, he said he thinks there will be lots of fish around there because there's lots of insects flying. He also mentioned that when he went egg hunting, there was a seagull that lays 4 eggs. They usually lay 4 eggs. But when they go out here and there, they found a seagull with 5 eggs. So, they think there will be fish swimming. We still have high tides when the tides come through, and low tides. Hopefully we're looking forward to fishing tomorrow and following the regulations with the 6-inch nets. Everyone in the village is looking forward to hanging some fish this week. And the fish are small, but the larger ones will be coming in soon. Small, medium, large – I don't know about the jacks – but the fish are small with the 6-inch. The big ones haven't come in yet.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I agree. The fish that our boat caught, the first was like a big chum, and the second was like a small red. It was very caught in the 6-inch gear, and we ended up just pulling it through. It was pocketed a few times. Neither one of them were big by our standards. Qu yana, Adolph!
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** Yes, one more thing. Me and my friend were talking about the mouth of the Eek, and we said, "Where's the real mouth of the Eek?" There's a lot of things across there. The real mouth, nobody knows. Most of the people from this area and from Kipnuk, around there, they

don't know when they say they're fishing at the mouth of the Eek River and it's really confusing. There's about 5 drains, and we said, where is the real mouth?

- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Yeah, that's a really good point. Even on the Johnson, it's wide, and it's not as wide and low a river as the Eek. Every year, the river changes a bit. Anyone else have anything to share or questions to ask? There was an issue with the McGrath ADF&G office being closed. I think that's been resolved. On Friday, the head of the McGrath office flew from Anchorage and had the office open from 2pm to 9pm to make sure folks from McGrath were able to get a household permit. I think they're making sure that office is open this week. I think there's been broad compliance. I think both the Feds and the State have been out checking nets. I think people understand that law enforcement is on the river and they are patrolling.
- **Spencer Reardon – USFWS/YDNWR:** I can tell you what I've seen from my house right next door. I see them going out. They've pulled a couple of nets, one of which was 7.5-inch mesh size. I haven't gotten a detailed report on them. They have a law enforcement pilot and some guys going in on the boats, making some presence where they can. That's all I know.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** We were discussing it with law enforcement just the other day. It's impressive and admirable that folks really take this conservation effort seriously. Apparently, they believe in it and are willing to support it, because with over 300 people wanting to go fish, there could easily be a lot of folks that had the wrong mesh size or different lengths of mesh. As Spencer was saying, there were very few cases. Even though they have 4 boats on the water and a plane in the air, everybody was taking things seriously and trying to abide by the rules, which can sometimes be hard to understand and confusing. There were very few issues on Saturday.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I agree, very outstanding compliance.
- **Katie Russell – ONC:** I just want to share that ONC talked to a lot of fishers, and probably more than 10 fishers had encountered law enforcement. At least one person said in regard to law enforcement that we all have to work together on this. Some people were appreciative of the law enforcement. I just want to share that and thank everybody in law enforcement for their efforts. Some people were commenting that there was more law enforcement than they've seen in the past. I can give an update about ONC's surveys, too. This year, we've conducted 128 surveys at the boat harbor, and people's average Chinook harvest was 5.9 Chinook. That was for this past Saturday, June 12. At Bethel area fish camps, ONC conducted 29 surveys. The average Chinook harvest was 7.8. Those numbers are actually looking better than our surveys showed in 2020. In the 2020 June 12 fishing opportunity, the average Chinook salmon harvest was only 3.5 at the boat harbor and 8.1 at fish camps. The numbers at the boat harbor are definitely looking higher this year than last.
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** When I set net, my full net, but hang the other one, I hang it with the string, so half the net is set-netting and the other half is tied with the string all the way up to the bank. Is that okay? I'm always scared that they'll come and tell me that I'm illegally set-netting.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I'm glad you mentioned that because Nick Smith talked about that on Fish Talk. He said it is legal to tie off or bundle up or put around a tarp the portion of the net that isn't being fished. He said it just kills a fisherman to cut their net, so they understand that and they're fine with whatever. During the front-end closure, it was 60 feet, now it's 150 feet above the Johnson and it can be the full 300 feet below the Johnson. So, if you have a 300-foot net, say, above the Johnson, you can just bundle up half, like Adolph is saying he does.
- **Christopher Tulik – USFWS/YDNWR:** I have a question for Katie. I know they're asking for the mesh sizes being used for the periods. I'm wondering if a lot more people are using 6-inch gear. There are

some people like myself using smaller mesh sizes. Katie, are you guys keeping track of how well people are doing with 6-inch mesh size nets as compared to the smaller net sizes?

- **Katie Russell – ONC:** Yes, at ONC, we do ask people their mesh size. The majority of people do fish with ...[audio cut out]... The mesh size range we encountered on June 12 was 4 to 6 inches. I don't have an average in front of me with mesh sizes, but if you'd like I can get you a breakdown of harvest by each mesh size.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Would anyone else like to share anything or ask any questions? The next fishing opportunity is tomorrow from 6:00am to 6:00pm using 6-inch gear. It's a half-shackle above the Johnson, or 150 feet for drifting, and 300 feet or a full shackle below the Johnson. You need to have your name, phone number, and address written on your buoy. You may also set net during this drift opportunity; however, each fisherman is allowed the length that I just mentioned, so if you're using a 150-foot set net, you can only drift with a 150-foot drift net. But if you have a fishing partner, your partner could do a set net, and the captain could do a drift net. That would be legal as long as you are from different households. KRITFC will be meeting with the Refuge Manager and his staff on June 17 at 10:00am to review the harvest estimates for the fishing period on June 15. A decision will be made at that time about either waiting for more data or announcing a time to fish. The In-Season Managers from KRITFC and Refuge staff may want to come back later to look at numbers again if the numbers don't look strong. If they are comfortable, they will announce when the next fishing period is. The state's Working Group is going to meet Wednesday; not really sure what's on the agenda there. Thursday we'll have Fish Talk on KYUK. Those are the things coming up this week. Boyd, do you want to add anything?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** Let's hope for lots of fish!
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Yeah, let's keep praying. We're really thankful for the fish we've been able to catch and sure hopeful that as more fish come in we have more chances to fish. Thank you everybody for dialing in, we really appreciate it, and we'll talk to you again soon!