

**Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Weekly River-Wide Teleconference
Monday, June 21, 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, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager

People on this call: 15

Summary:

- At the Saturday, June 19 fishing opportunity, there were an estimated 511 drift net trips. Estimated harvest was roughly 9,500 total salmon; 6,200 Chinook salmon; 1,000 chum salmon; and 2,400 sockeye salmon.
- Estimated cumulative harvest from Tuntutuliak to Akiak is roughly 17,000 Chinook salmon, 1,400 chum salmon, and 4,200 sockeye salmon.
- KRITFC and YDNWR will meet Monday, June 21, to review in-season assessment data and discuss another potential fishing opportunity. [*Note June 22: Managers from KRITFC and YDNWR decided to wait to review more king and chum salmon data before potentially announcing another fishing opportunity.*]
- July 4 is the historical peak for chum and sockeye salmon passage.
- KRITFC staff can assist Tribal Councils with writing letters or resolutions about king salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea.

Full Notes:

- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Good morning everyone, thank you for joining us. I thought maybe we could ask Kevin Whitworth or Katie Russell or Danielle Lowrey to share the harvest estimate for Saturday's fishing opportunity. Boyd, do you want to say anything before we get started?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** Good morning and happy Monday! That's about it.

- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I've had a number of calls this morning already asking when the next fishing opportunity is. KRITFC and the Refuge are meeting today to discuss that, to review the harvest estimate as well as other in-season assessment indexes. Boyd, do you want to share anything?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** I look forward to meeting this afternoon. I'll say that I agree; the information coming in from the harvest report and coupling that with the assessment of the data from Bethel Test Fish and Bethel sonar and other things will be good to discuss today. I would prefer to get a decision made early in the week. Last week, we made a decision on Thursday about fishing between KRITFC and USFWS, and we got surprised by a Federal holiday on Friday. A lot of the resources I have and staff at the Refuge and others were unavailable. So, getting the announcement out officially on paper was challenging and difficult to get done by Friday morning, but we did it. I would like to get something announced earlier so people who want to fish will know at least know what the date is, even if it is 4 or 5 days away, or whatever the case may be. If folks know in advance, they can plan and get the word out. That will be my goal. I just look forward to talking this week.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Thank you, Boyd. I certainly felt the stress of not having an official, in-writing announcement. I was glad that KYUK went ahead with the announcement based on Fish Talk and the announcements that Aaron Moses and Christopher Tulik gave out on Thursday after our meeting. I know there was a lot of hesitation that it was just word of mouth and an incorrect rumor. Kevin, do you want to go over what is estimated to have been harvested in federal waters?
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Sure! Katie Russell at ONC, myself, Bill Bechtol, and Ben Staton produced the harvest estimate yesterday from the June 19 opportunity. There were 237 total interviews; 2 overflights by USFWS. On the first, there were 437 drift nets counted and 12 set nets. On the second flight, 271 drift nets were counted and 28 set nets. The effort estimate was at 511 total drift trips occurred. An estimated total of about 9,500 salmon were harvested: an estimated total of about 6,200 Chinook salmon were harvested, with a confidence interval of 5,300 to 7,100; an estimated total of almost 1,000 chum salmon were harvested; and an estimated total of 2,400 sockeye salmon were harvested. That was from the drift net opportunity. For set nets, about 630 total salmon were harvested; of that, 62% of those were Chinook salmon. Cumulative harvest to date: if you added the 3 set net opportunities (June 2, 5, and 9) plus the 3 drift and set net opportunities (June 12, 15, and 19), for Chinook salmon, we're at about 17,000; for chum salmon, about 1,400; and for sockeye, about 4,200. This estimate is for the mainstem Kuskokwim River for drift and net opportunities from Tunt to Akiak. It does not include Kuskokwim Bay, non-salmon tributaries, other means and methods, or above Akiak. That's all Mary, thank you!
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Are the cumulative harvests written on the in-season harvest estimate? Or is each for its own opening?
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** That's correct. The document is only for the one day. The cumulative harvest is in the assessment package that ADF&G puts out. We give them in the information and they put it in there, on the back page, page 8.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Thank you. Are there any questions for Kevin about the harvest on Saturday or cumulative numbers?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** Good morning, Kevin. The harvest estimate mentions that the upriver area from Akiak to Aniak, that furthest upriver area, it mentioned that for the upriver area between Akiak to Aniak or something – the furthest area upriver – it mentioned there were 0 interviews conducted but an estimated number of fishers and there was still an estimate of the harvest. How do they come up with that estimate if there are no interviews?

- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** I'm not sure where you are referring to that strata above Akiak because this estimate is only from Tunt to Akiak. The last strata upriver is from Akiachak to Akiak, so it doesn't include Aniak. Is that what you're referring to?
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** Yes, I meant to say Akiak, thanks.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Okay, yep. There were 0 interviews in that area, and in an effort estimate, aerial surveys counted 45 boats in that area. What the program does is share information from the strata nearest it, from Napakiak to Akiachak. That's my understanding.
- **Katie Russell – ONC:** Hi everyone. Definitely what Kevin said. This program was made by Ben Staton, who's a contractor with KRITFC. He was able to code the program so if there were not enough interviews – I believe the threshold is if somewhere had less than 10 interviews – it would pull information from other areas so it would be able to make a reliable estimate. Again, that effort estimate is from flight data, which was counted. There is no monitor up in the Akiachak to Akiak zone, so the program was able to pull data from the other zones to be able to make that estimate.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Yes, and it's a good thing we had a robust amount of effort and interviews in that next strata from Napaskiak to Akiachak. We had 111 interviews in that strata, and an effort of 212 boats counted from aerial surveys. That was a robust amount of interviews and effort, so it's a good thing we had all those. A very good job by ONC and KRITFC monitors on conducting so many interviews.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I only have one fishing report from up near Aniak. The person I was in communication with fished for the whole 12 hours and only caught 2 kings. That was the whole catch for that fisherman. Other reports were similar; others fished and didn't catch anything, or maybe 1. I think the high boat was 2 around Aniak. It would be great if there's anyone from up by Aniak who fished, and if you'd like to give a fishing report, it would be appreciated. Is there anyone else who would like to share a comment or ask a question?
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** Good morning. I was down with the Fish Commissioner from Tunt, I don't think he's on. For the fishing report on my own, on Saturday, we caught 8 kings and 8 sockeye with 5 and 7/8 inch mesh nets. On June 15, 10 kings, 3 sockeye with 6 inch. On non-salmon tributary on June 17, 3 kings and 1 sockeye with 5 and 7/8 inch. On June 18, 7 kings, 6 sockeye with 5 and 7/8 inch. Weather-wise, it was calm, and it was hard to catch fish. If there's another opening this week – oh, on Saturday, the tide in the morning was too low. My boat was high and dry at 6:00 am. But it went out later on. So if there's a possible opening on Thursday or so, I'd like it around 9:00 am so my boat will be afloat. That's my personal fishing report from Tuntutuliak.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** That's really good to know, Adolph, thank you. There was a long discussion about the times, and there was consideration of 9:00 am to 9:00 pm, but the concern was having different times since we've had a pattern of 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. For consistency's sake, the group last time decided on 6am. I'm not saying they'll do that again, but we did have a full discussion about the tide. My fishing report is a little bit different; our tides aren't so dramatic around Bethel. The boat I used to go fishing was floating at 6:00 am. It was a lower tide, and we fished until 11:00 am, but we didn't really catch anything through the tide change. Our boat caught 7 kings and 2 reds, and all those catches were on the outgoing tide. They were all in deep water at the deep part of the lead line. I fished around Schwalbe, and being around Bethel, it's so competitive. By 9:00 or 10:00 am, there were so many people. So we decided to call it a day at 10:30 am and be happy with our catch, and we really are happy with what we caught. Adolph, I just wanted to let you know that the In-Season Managers and everyone at the Refuge are all putting thought into that tide.

- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** Yeah, and our catches were not large, but medium and small kings.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** We had quite a number of smaller kings. We got all males on Saturday, even the reds. Does anyone else want to share a fishing report.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** Good morning. I fished straight above Napaskiak. I caught 5. Compared to the last opener: on June 15, I think I caught mostly kings, and this opener, the size changed to smaller kings. I think a big brunt of the kings, the first pulse, has passed. It's usually an indicator when the kings are getting smaller around here that the first pack of kings has passed. You guys are concerned about chums not returning or being low. The biggest indicator historically from my experience is July 4; maybe after July 4, we should be concerned if the chum are returning low. When I was young, my late grandfather used to tell me that reds and chums alternate every other year. I believe last year was a high return for reds, so I'm expecting this year to be high for chums. But I could be wrong because we're dealing with climate change, and I know from watching Bristol Bay that these reds love these warmer waters than a little cooler like chums. Maybe for conservation's sake, try to open when these smaller fish arrive, as I'm happy with our 13 hanging kings. On Saturday, I caught 5: 1 red, 2 chums, and 2 kings, which were smaller than the prior opening. The kings were 1 female and 1 male. I went out close to 8:00 am, and I wasn't catching on the incoming tide. I fished upriver all my life, and the tide doesn't matter up there, but down here, when the incoming tide is coming, we usually start catching. My brother caught 25; I believe it was a mix of kings, reds, and chums.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Thank you. I'm interested that you said you think chums will be coming in strong because there is some concern, at least among KRITFC, because Bethel sonar has recorded 0 passage. None of their test nets are catching chum so far. I'm really hoping they're late because it's never been this low in terms of ADF&G indexes.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** We've got to remember that the last 10 years, we've been dealing with low water. I believe [this year] we're dealing with high water, and the chums are colder fish than these kings and reds, and they're probably swimming way low. That's what I'm thinking. We're still high, and I don't think we're going to see them because there's still a lot of snow up in the mountains.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** That's really good feedback. This is really good Traditional Knowledge and observations. Quyana.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** And one other thing: If the fish meetings could be on Tuesdays, because Mondays are Yuk to Yuk, and I'm an avid listener of that show.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I apologize for that. Is there anyone else who wants to share anything or ask any questions?
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** July 3 and 4 is the best date to know if the chums and sockeyes are really running. They're the peak days. July 3 and 4 days will give the estimates for how many will be going upriver, the ratios of chums and sockeye. Even if they're high, we do not fish everyday, because it's pretty hard to keep the maggots out. It's a good day for smoking dryfish. One of the subsistence fishermen said that bycatch needs to be addressed and stopped. The bycatch people in the ocean out there, they're not regulated. But the Kuskokwim is over-regulated. KRITFC needs to address that somehow. On the talk show, I heard that the Kuskokwim is focusing on the conservation. He told me yes, conservation is very good for the Kuskokwim River, and those regulations are good. But it's not too fair because of the bycatchers out there. One of the fishermen upriver was interviewed by ADF&G, near Johnson River, and he was concerned about non-spawning tributaries being closed in the future or doing something about them in the future. He likes those non-spawning tributaries – Johnson River, Kialik, Tunt, Agyaraq, and Pailleq – he likes them just as they are. If Dave Runfola is one, he must be the

one for ADF&G because is called and stopped by Tunt to talk to people, and he'll be coming again to meet with Tunt fishermen. I'm thinking, what's the best way to address the bycatch? Is it by our Tribal Councils to the RACs?

- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Yeah, that might work. One of the things that we can do at KRITFC is draft a resolution from your Tribe. It doesn't have to be addressed to anyone in particular, just a resolution on bycatch and a concern, and the injustice of the conservation being put on subsistence fishermen, but then industrial fishing processes don't have the same restrictions. Our office can work on a draft, or work with your Council to make sure we have all the points you want to have covered. We can call you later about that, and any other Tribe that wants help doing a resolution. We want as many of those as possible as we work with people who are updating Magnuson-Stevens Act, and also try to use the public process with North Pacific Fishery Management Council. We're looking at different angles: either the legislation that created it or our congressional delegation or other political means to make a difference on that front. And we're happy to work with the RAC too.
- **Janessa Esquible – ONC:** Hey Mary. Regarding what Adolph was just saying, and your response, I know ONC has also expressed great concern about bycatch. If there's a resolution we could also present to the Council, if that would be helpful, just let us know.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Okay, yes. Just to recap, you all know there was fishing on Saturday. KRITFC, our In-Season Managers, and the Refuge are meeting today to look at the harvest estimates, ADF&G's assessments, and factor in Traditional Knowledge. After that meeting, there will be either an announcement that they're going to review data later or that there may be fishing. But no decisions have been made yet. There was a rumor going around Kwethluk that there was for sure going to be fishing this week, but there have been no decisions made yet. Just being clear: nothing has been determined. Once they meet and decide the next course of action, we'll do everything we can to get that information out through KYUK or Facebook or our website, and I'm sure the Refuge will do the same.
- **Boyd Blihovde – USFWS/YDNWR:** I'll just say I appreciate once again all the compliance with all the regulations. It was mentioned on the call here that we're restricted so much on the river here while the Bering Sea fishery seems to be less regulated. I understand that frustration. I was out on Friday on a boat, and I noticed everybody was getting ready and going to fish camps. There were a lot of boats starting to stack up at the Bethel small boat harbor. I was also out Saturday right after the opener, on boat, and I noticed the exact opposite: everybody had removed their nets right after the closing time, and a lot of the boats were already out of the boat harbor. I was impressed by everyone buying in and accepting the regulations. Even though nobody is happy, at least everyone is doing the right thing for conservation and getting their fishing in when they're supposed to. I appreciate that, and I know law enforcement has noticed that as well. So I just want to say thanks.
- **Katie Russell – ONC:** I can share some of ONC's information that we gathered at the past 2 openers. All this information will be in the Working Group packet as well. On June 15, ONC staff was able to conduct 134 interviews at the Bethel boat harbor. The average Chinook harvest was about 7.5; the average chum harvest was 0.4; and the average red harvest was 1.4. For Bethel area fish camps, ONC was able to survey 26 camps. The average Chinook harvest was about 12.8; chum harvest was 0.3; and the average red harvest was 2.8. For the opener that happened this past weekend on June 19, ONC was able to conduct 125 surveys at the boat harbor. The average Chinook harvest was 6.6; chum was 0.7; and sockeye harvest was 3.1. At Bethel area fish camps, ONC staff conducted 31 surveys. The average Chinook harvest was 12.1; chum harvest was 1.1; and the average red harvest was 5.8. We

have been getting a lot of comments from fishers about low chum numbers or chums not being here yet. If you have questions, please let me or Danielle Lowrey know, and we'll get them answered.

- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** Are there state biologists online?
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Sean Larson, Nick Smith, or Ben Gray, are you on the call? They're always invited, and when we started this call, they were co-hosts. I'm not sure why they're not participating anymore.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** I was going to make a point. Back in the early and mid-1980s, when the chum started falling, Area M was a major factor. They're harvesting commercial fishing. Have they been operating to catch commercial chums down there?
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** I don't know, and that's something I'll ask at the Working Group on Wednesday. Does anyone online have an answer?
- **LaMont Albertson – KRITFC:** I've asked that question, and I've always been told no. But like you, I've heard that there were 3 boats or intercepts earlier in the season this year in Area M. Right now, I've heard there's no interference with our fish.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** And when that happened back then, they closed down that fishery and a few years later our chums started returning in high numbers. That's one thing we need to look back into and start monitoring. I don't know where KRITFC is in trying to gain a seat with NPFMC. I think even one representative with 30+ communities submitting resolutions to that body will come in with a stronger voice.
- **LaMont Albertson – KRITFC:** I think you make an excellent point, Steven, and that's one we would like to make also. You can help us by getting support from your community. We feel the very same way. All of us on KRITFC have been around for years and generations, and we also remember when we had trouble with the chums. We're prepared, as is Boyd, to put restrictions regarding chums on like we have with kings for the last 8 years. Any help you can give us would be appreciated with your community and locally. That's what we have in mind. Thanks very much, I appreciate your outlook and I hope everyone feels that way.
- **Mary Peltola – KRITFC:** Thanks, LaMont. If there's nothing else, we can wrap up this call. Have a good week everyone!