



KUSKOKWIM RIVER

INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION

2021 Post-Season Summary **Current as of September 3, 2021**

In-Season Management + Subsistence Fishing Opportunities

During the Chinook salmon fishing season – beginning in early May through the end of July – KRITFC In-Season Managers and Elder Advisors meet regularly with U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff to assess the salmon runs and decide whether or not to open the river to subsistence fishing. Their decisions are guided by Traditional Knowledge and local observations and data from Bethel Test Fish, Bethel sonar, and community harvest data.

The KRITFC 2021 In-Season Managers are:

- James Nicori (Kwethluk) – Upper Middle River
- Jacki Cleveland (Quinhagak) – Lower River
- Megan Leary (Napaimute) – Upper River
- Avery Hoffman (Bethel) – Lower Middle River
- Robert Lekander (Bethel) – Elder Advisor
- James Charles (Tuntutuliak) – Elder Advisor

These In-Season Managers, KRITFC staff, and fisheries management staff from the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge – namely Boyd Blihovde, Aaron Moses, Spencer Reardon, and Christopher Tulik – met throughout the king, chum, and sockeye salmon season to determine federal subsistence fishing opportunities. Quyana, Tsen’ahn, Thank you to James, Jacki, Megan, and Avery for your tireless work providing Traditional Knowledge, river-wide insights, and management recommendations this season; to Robert and James for sharing your wisdom and guidance; and to the Yukon Delta NWR staff for your partnership and collaborative leadership.

KRITFC and U.S. Fish and Wildlife provided for 11 subsistence fishing opportunities (drift and set gillnet) this season after the USFWS in-season manager closed the main stem Kuskokwim to gillnet fishing for all salmon starting June 1. These opportunities were:

- June 2 (set gillnet)
- June 5 (set gillnet)
- June 9 (set gillnet)
- June 12 (drift and set gillnet)
- June 15 (drift and set gillnet)
- June 19 (drift and set gillnet)
- July 2 (drift and set gillnet)
- July 9 (drift and set gillnet)
- July 10-11 (set gillnet)
- July 16 (drift and set gillnet)
- July 17-18 (set gillnet)

The estimated salmon harvests in the main stem lower Kuskokwim River (from Tuntutuliak to Akiak, excluding fish harvested from non-Chinook salmon spawning tributaries) during these opportunities were:

- Chinook salmon: 21,560 fish
- Sockeye salmon: 22,910 fish

- Chum salmon: 4,060 fish

These numbers come from harvest estimates produced by KRITFC and ONC with Bethel area harvest information provided by ONC; community-based harvest information provided by KRITFC harvest monitors (see more information about the CBHM Program below); and aerial surveys provided by USFWS at Yukon Delta NWR. Complete harvest estimates from each opportunity can be found on our website:

kuskosalmon.org/2021-fishing-info.

•••••

CBHM Program

The Community-Based Harvest Monitoring (CBHM) program was created by Bering Sea Fisherman’s Association (BSFA) in collaboration with KRITFC in 2017 to monitor subsistence fish harvests in lower river villages and increase community involvement in fisheries management and monitoring. In 2021, KRITFC coordinated and funded the program. Yukon Delta NWR committed \$30,000 to this program, but because of bureaucratic issues, KRITFC has not received this funding as of the time of this writing.

Most of the 2021 harvest monitors were veterans of the program. Each harvest monitor surveys fishers in their village community after federal subsistence fishing opportunities. This season began with training on May 26. Harvest monitoring occurred during 10 of the 11 opportunities.

The 2021 CBHM program harvest monitors – and the communities in which they live and surveyed – are:

- James Heakin (Eek) – new harvest monitor
- Brianna Dock (Tuntutuliak)
- Isaiah Pavila (Tuntutuliak)
- Emmitt Nicori (Napakiak)
- Wesley Nicholai (Napaskiak)
- Dezmin Johnson (Napaskiak) – new harvest monitor
- Colleen Andrew (Kwethluk)
- William Egoak (Kwethluk)
- Alfred Epchook (Kwethluk)

Altogether, these 9 harvest monitors collected 540 total interviews from subsistence fishers. Data from each of these interviews informed KRITFC and USFWS managers about fishing trip locations, soak times, mesh and net sizes, and numbers of salmon and non-salmon species harvested.

A big quyanana to each of these harvest monitors for working with their communities to collect invaluable salmon harvest information after long days of fishing for their own families.

•••••

Takotna River Weir Project

The Takotna River provides the longest data set (18 years including 2021) of spawner returns at the Kuskokwim headwaters. Located about 2 miles upstream of the village of Takotna, it employs local weir technicians and is run in partnership with the Takotna Village Council and Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

The 2021 Takotna River weir crew faced high water conditions during the installation period of the weir. However, they were able to have the weir installed and fish-tight by July 4. Weir removal will occur in mid-August, and escapement estimates will be finalized at the end of the season (after the time of this writing). Members of the 2021 weir crew are:

- Robert Perkins – crew leader
- Manuel Martinez – assistant crew leader
- Joe Martinez – weir technician
- Richard Watcher – weir technician
- Shawn Gover – weir technician
- Mike Dopler – weir technician

Tsen'ahn, Quyana, Thank you to each of these weir technicians for your dedication and perseverance through the season.

Note: High water conditions and COVID-19 precautions prevented installation and operation of the **Kwethluk River weir**, typically run in partnership between the Organized Village of Kwethluk, KRITFC, and USFWS. No data was collected from this weir in 2021, nor in 2020.

•••••

In-Season Community Involvement

KRITFC strives to stay connected to and in communication with fishers throughout the river during the fishing season by:

- Holding weekly Monday river-wide teleconferences with the Yukon Delta NWR. Fishers from Tuntutuliak to McGrath joined these calls to ask about management decisions, find out the next federal subsistence fishing opportunities, and share Traditional Knowledge and fishing updates from their communities.
- Participating in ADF&G's Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group meetings each Wednesday. KRITFC's delegates to the Working Group this season are Avery Hoffman and James Nicori, but other KRITFC Fish Commissioners, Executive Council members, In-Season Managers, and staff regularly joined these meetings as voting and public members.
- Joining the Yukon Delta NWR and ADF&G staff on KYUK's Fish Talk, held weekly on Thursdays. Fishers from the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers called in to voice concerns, ask federal, state, and Tribal managers about fishing opportunities, and share fishing updates from their communities.

KRITFC wants to hear from and speak with fishing communities throughout the Kuskokwim River drainage, whether in-season or out-of-season. If you would like us to speak with your Tribal or village council, please contact us at info@kritfc.org or (907) 545-6206.