



**Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Weekly River-Wide Teleconference
Tuesday, May 24, 2022 | 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 week of the 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 2022, it will be held Tuesdays at 10am starting May 24 until the end of the fisheries management season.

People on this call: 13

Summary Notes:

- Federal management of the Kuskokwim begins June 1 at 12:01am. There will be set net periods for Federally qualified subsistence users on June 1, 4, and 8 from 6am–10pm, and drift or set net periods on June 12 and 16 from 6am–6pm.
- Subsistence fishermen are encouraged to try fishing with alternative gear types: dip nets, rod and reel, beach seines, fish wheels. Under federal regulations, Chinook and chum salmon can be retained with these gear types, and fishing with these gear types can happen at any time.
- USFWS, KRITFC, and ADF&G try to work together locally but are prevented from working together formally because of the state legislature.
- Area M fishermen caught 1.1–2.2 million chum salmon in 2021. On the Kuskokwim, the 2021 chum salmon return was the poorest on record.
- The 100-yard line markers have been reinstalled by USFWS. They are yellow rhombus shapes.
- Smelt are heading upriver and logs from the headwaters are headed downriver.

Full Notes:

Federal Emergency Special Action 3-KS-01-22

- **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** People fishing out here, no salmon caught yet.

- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Welcome to our first teleconference. Notes will be posted on our [website](#) after the fact for your review; you can find last year's teleconference notes there, too. I'll start by going through the federal emergency special action; feel free to put questions in the chat. On May 2, 2022, USFWS issued an emergency special action. Federal management will take effect on the Kuskokwim on June 1 at 12:01am. Closes the federal waters within Yukon Delta NWR to the take of salmon for non-Federally qualified subsistence users. Front end closure from June 1–11. Pre-announced set net opportunities for FQSUs on the main stem of the Kuskokwim in federal waters: June 1, 4, and 8, 6am–10pm. Pre-announced drift/set net opportunities for FQSUs on the main stem of the Kuskokwim in federal waters: June 12 and 16, 6am–6pm.
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** State made announcements as well, unfortunately. One thing we want is to encourage alternative gear types like dip nets, hook and line, beach seines, so we allowed retention of salmon using those gear types. Those are open at all times on the main stem of the Kuskokwim.
- **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** Email I got from ADF&G says in our area, Quinhagak, they are closing on Sundays, but they have the date wrong. Our closures are Sundays according to ADF&G.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** ADF&G also closed sport fishing for king salmon from May 1–June 11.
- **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** Does that mean outfitters can still set up camp?
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Good question, and the emergency order excludes Kuskokwim Bay and drainages.
- **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** I think there's an outfitter already here setting up camp.
- **Martin Andrew – Kwethluk:** Boyd: Through the announcements of the emergency special action, there are set net opportunities and drift/set net opportunities. Wanted clarification on in between the closures and opportunity dates, like between June 1 and June 12, would residents be allowed to use alternative methods like dip nets?
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** Great question, you are exactly right. Outside of the dates where it's open for gillnets, FQSUs can go on the main stem of the Kuskokwim with alternative gear types and retain Chinook salmon. They're not the most effective gear type, but I know folks who have caught using hook and line and dip nets. Especially when sockeye were coming in, people caught upwards of 60 sockeye in a day using these alternative gear types.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Emergency special action says FQSUs can use dip nets, beach seines, fish wheels, and rod and reel on the main stem Kuskokwim River, and retention of Chinook and chum salmon is allowed. That includes the June 1–11 time period.

Salmon Outlook

- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** ADF&G projected 99,000–161,000 Chinook salmon in 2022. Don't have a chum salmon projection, but we are looking at another poor run. Last year's was the poorest chum return on record. Sockeye salmon will look about average, should meet escapement goals and have similar harvest to last year; same with coho salmon.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** Surprised at action by USFWS and KRITFC to keep chum salmon when they're predicted to return in low numbers. When they are released back alive, that means more fish in future years. Chum runs will probably remain dismal for next years as long as Area M runs remain open. We know Area M is gateway for Kuskokwim, Yukon, Norton Sound salmon. Where is ADF&G biologist? They should be included in this conversation when we have been facing this for a decade or more. When we are in conservation mode, those areas that are open, like the Kialiq River, salmon go in there and rest. We need a taste of salmon on those short days they are open. I've gone to Quinhagak to fish, and they have their own fishery with salmon entering the Kanektok River. Our commercial fisheries, which were our means for cash revenue, have been gone for over a decade, too. I would like

Boyd and Kevin to invite the Kuskokwim Area biologist and start working together to draft an MOU, rather than flexing muscles. Saw that Yukon will be federalized this year, and I'm glad because Yukon Delta has a better hand at this than when we first started.

- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** USFWS and KRITFC debated at length about retention of even kings or chums with alternative gear types. We ended up deciding that there are not many people trying these alternative types, it is not as effective, and these types are more selective than a gillnet, so we allowed retention. It is an incentive for people to start trying other methods. The gillnets are what we are concerned about from a conservation standpoint. We hope that folks will start taking the chance for alternative gear types and get good at using them. By law in ANILCA and delegated down through the Federal Subsistence Board, I have to work with the Tribes, and I do. We have been trying to work with ADF&G and KRITFC too.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Could you elaborate more on how you work with ADF&G managers and biologists, and us as well?
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** These calls and meetings are a way to talk. We have a great relationship with KRITFC, solidified in an MOU. We also have MOUs and legal requirements with the state that keep us working together. More than that, the state does a lot of good monitoring on the river; we depend on them for Bethel Test Fish and sonar data, as well as a lot of weir data. KRITFC provides harvest monitoring on the river. There are practical reasons to working together. We tried to have a 3-way memorandum between USFWS, KRITFC, and ADF&G, but it never went to completion. It would be great to start that again soon.
- **Jim Simon – KRITFC:** One of the challenges we have with formalizing an MOU between KRITFC, USFWS, and ADF&G is that the Alaska legislature has passed a law that forbids the State of Alaska executive branch – including ADF&G – from entering into any agreement with the federal government that diminishes the state's sovereign rights to manage fish and game. Need to change the law AS 16.05.935. Yukon is different because they are under the Pacific Salmon Treaty, which trumps state statutes. We would like to see this relationship formalized, but it is prevented by the legislature.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Area M management was brought up. Last year, chum salmon on the Kuskokwim was terrible and harvest was way down. About 10,000 chum salmon were caught river-wide in 2021, including the Bay and coastal villages; that is significantly lower than historic levels. At the same time, Area M fishermen caught almost 1.2 million salmon. There is data showing that some of these fish come to the AYK region, from 1% all the way up to 67% of them. KRITFC put in a proposal through the Board of Fish to limit the interception of chum in that area. We are also working on a letter to request that Area M do more to conserve chum. Area M is managed by a different ADF&G region, and we are learning to work with these folks.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** Harvest for Area M chum last year totaled to 2.2 million chums, as it's in the website directly. That's a lot of chums intercepted. I don't agree that only 1% come up here like they say. I believe if they hadn't fished, at least half a million would have come to our area.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** 1.1 million refers only to the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June fishery.
- **Jim Simon – KRITFC [in chat]:** Our AYK BOF meeting will be January 14-18, 2023 at the Egan Center in Anchorage. The Area M BOF meeting will be February 13-17, 2023 at Egan Center in Anchorage and it will be important to get as many Kuskokwim representatives to testify about the interception of our salmon in the Area M commercial fisheries.

NPFMC June Meeting

- **Terese Schomogyi – KRITFC:** The [North Pacific Fishery Management Council](#) manages federal marine fisheries off the coast of Alaska, including the commercial Bering Sea pollock fishery and salmon

bycatch, which are discarded. The Council is meeting June 6-14 (agenda [here](#)). They will meet in Sitka and on teleconference. One of the items they will be talking about includes salmon bycatch, salmon genetic reports, and salmon research done by NOAA, NMFS, and ADF&G. There are ways for the public to engage: Written comments are accepted May 20–June 3 by any individual or organization; and oral testimony (3 minutes for individuals, 6 minutes for organizations and companies) during the meeting. Comment submissions and testimony sign-ups are online. KRITFC will share information on our [website](#), [Facebook page](#), and via [newsletter](#). You can also contact me at 907-545-7388 or terese@kritfc.org. I will be sitting in the meeting, too, and can let you know when to call in so you don't have to be there the whole time. The next time the Council will meet is in October.

- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** Usually Aaron Martin or Pete F attends for USFWS. I give my comments to them. Last time, I specified how often we hear frustration about Area M and False Pass and other Bering Sea related issues, and how we get restrictions here on subsistence users but there are not equal restrictions on industry.

In-Season Projects

- **LaMont Albertson – KRITFC:** [Community-Based Harvest Monitoring \(CBHM\)](#) is on track, and the only community I haven't met with is Akiak (*note: KRITFC is still looking to hire a harvest monitor in Akiak as of 05/24*). We are paying \$22–\$30/hour this year, and harvest monitoring in most lower river villages: Tuluksak, Akiak, Akiachak, Kwethluk, Napaskiak, Napakiak, and Eek/Tuntutuliak. We are also cooperating with ONC and their Bethel area surveys. We take the harvest numbers and put them together for KRITFC and USFWS's fishing recommendations. We are working each opening we have and using the set net openings as practice.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** USFWS and KRITFC work on several projects together. The Kwethluk River weir has been successfully installed for the first time in 3 years. Just waiting to start counting around June 20. Right after breakup, we installed a Kwethluk River screw trap looking at out-migrating smolt from that system. This is something we will put a report together on after the season. We are working with folks from Kwethluk and Tuluksak on this. Successful projects underway.

Participant/Closing Comments

- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** Thanks for clarifying the NPFMC and Area M. I'm happy NPFMC will start listening in June. I love to work with fish biologists. Even if the state does not want to recognize us, if it's true that state legislatures say that, then we need to push for good working relationship with our biologists. We need to push for more appropriately timed fishing in our areas. Going to be challenging in 2022 because the salmon populations need to be sustainable and managed this year, using local and Indigenous Knowledge. We are always told there will be fish, but according to the data, they're getting to the end so we have to manage them in this way. The environmentalists and biologists with the fishermen say this. I am happy that they will have set and drift net periods this season. Good opportunity for FQSUs. Soon the sonar and test fish are set up for the season. The fish will go by before the end of the day as soon as the ice flows out. I thank the Kuskokwim River management for giving me education and knowledge in these meetings, and for Commissioners and others speaking their concerns. Boyd, you mentioned working together was our goal, that was our goal some years ago [at KRITFC's annual meeting]. Fish techs are available and try to meet every boat to do monitoring. Salmon monitoring with OVK, Tuluksak, and ADF&G have a nice fish technician. [Speaks in Yugtun.] Last year we didn't meet our subsistence harvest because fish were declining. This year, the escapement goal of 100,000–120,000 is the target, but in the meantime, those fishing opportunities are opportunities for subsistence. Qu yana!
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Thank you Adolph, appreciate your words and ecosystem approach to salmon management. Any other comments?

- **Aaron Moses – Yukon Delta NWR:** Happy to be back on meetings. Alternative gear types are getting more popular; hoping to see more people dip-netting at least.
- **Christopher Tulik – Yukon Delta NWR:** USFWS officer Matt MacDonald has reposted some of the 100-line markers downriver. They look like a rhombus shape with a yellow background. He included the coordinates for those markers, so I can get those to you.
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** I hear that smelt are arriving, and maybe already past Bethel now. That's a good sign!
- **Aaron Moses – Yukon Delta NWR:** Haven't heard today if they are at Bethel or not; heard they were below Bethel yesterday.
- **Terese Schomogyi – KRITFC:** Smelt were running past Bethel last night!
- **Christopher Tulik – Yukon Delta NWR:** Went dipping yesterday evening, got a 5-gallon bucket of smelts. What I've learned is that these smelts pass through and will be further upriver the next day.
- **Adolph Lupie – Tuntutuliak:** Ate some smelts yesterday and I already have a bird egg. They really taste good. Some more went up to Napakiak to catch those fish.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** During breakup in the headwaters, there was significant flooding in McGrath, Red Devil, and Sleetmute. There are lots of nice, clean logs coming your way. Get your rope ready!
- **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** Are you in McGrath right now? Are the trees still floating down the river?
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Yes. Just two days ago, I went up the Takotna River looking for black bear and waterfowl, and we were constantly dodging logs. Tons coming out of the Takotna right now. Still a lot of snow in the hills, and we've been having warm weather so it's melting.
- **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** Sweet, waiting for some logs down here. In other fish news, Independent Fishermen of Quinhagak were not able to secure a tender, so there will not be commercial fishing down here this summer.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Great first call. We will have another call next week on May 31, same time, same call-in number. Talk to you then.

Quyana, Tsen'ahn, Thank you for joining!