



KUSKOKWIM RIVER

INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION

OUR RIVER, OUR PEOPLE, OUR FISH

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Report to the RAC | Winter Meeting 2022

Updated: January 27, 2022

The Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) would like to provide the following updates for you as we head into the 2022 salmon season:

I. Federal Management

- KRITFC continues to work well with federal management partners at the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR). We are more confident and pleased with this partnership than ever thanks to a successful 2021 collaborative management season.
- KRITFC and YDNWR plan to utilize our joint Salmon Management Strategy and Harvest Strategy for the second season.
- KRITFC looks forward to the YDNWR Manager, Boyd Blihovde, using his existing delegation of authority to federalize the lower Kuskokwim River, within the boundaries of YDNWR, in the 2022 season.
- KRITFC foresees federal management being needed on the Kuskokwim for many years to come.
- KRITFC remains concerned that federal agencies defer to the State of Alaska and seem to overlook their federal responsibilities. We continue to remind federal agencies and their staff of their obligations to uphold and operate within the legal bounds of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Title VIII, as well as their own agency mandates for conservation.

II. AYK Salmon Conservation & Restoration

- The 118 Tribes of the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) region are coalescing over our shared concerns for our depressed salmon stocks. These Tribes are represented by the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC), Kawerak, Inc., the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (YRITFC), and KRITFC.
- These five organizations form the renewed AYK Tribal Consortium (AYK TC). Our shared goal is to: *Restore, maintain, and conserve the health and biodiversity of the Bering Sea ecosystems, rivers to seas, including a focus on restoration of abundance of wild salmon returns, all to provide for our subsistence way of life and other sustainable uses (including sustainable commercial uses) for this and future generations.*

III. 2022 Salmon Season Projects

KRITFC looks forward to implementing the following salmon monitoring projects in 2022:

- *Community-Based Harvest Monitoring (CBHM) Program:* Through the CBHM program, KRITFC hires local Tribal citizens to survey their communities after subsistence fishing opportunities. This is one of the Fish Commission's most important programs because it provides an immediate in-season index of salmon run strength, run timing, and community harvest data for our In-Season Managers to use before Bethel Test Fish and Bethel Sonar data come in, which typically is not until mid-June. KRITFC hopes to operate the CBHM program in at least 6 villages, including one middle or upper river community, in the 2022 season – the sixth season this project will run.
- *Takotna River Weir:* Located 2 miles upstream of the village of Takotna, the Takotna River weir is an important Kuskokwim headwaters Chinook and chum salmon run index and heat stress monitoring site. KRITFC hires local residents to install and operate the weir, and we work with Takotna Tribal Council and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to operate the project. The 2022 season will be the sixth season KRITFC has funded and overseen this weir.
- *Kwethluk River Weir:* KRITFC, the Organized Village of Kwethluk (OVK), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) plan to install and operate the Kwethluk River weir in 2022. The Kwethluk River is the second most productive tributary in the Kuskokwim drainage basin. Since this weir did not operate in 2020 or 2021, it is critical that this weir operates this season.
- *Kwethluk River Freshwater Productivity Study:* In this project, funded with an award from the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative (AYK SSI), KRITFC and USFWS will operate a screw trap just upstream of the Kwethluk River weir to count juvenile salmon smolt as they migrate out of the Kwethluk system. This will give us an idea of the number of salmon leaving the river; coupled with information from the weir, we will have an idea of how many juvenile salmon are leaving and adult salmon are entering the system. USFWS previously ran this program and we are looking forward to partnering with them to operate it once again.
 - We are hiring 3 Fish Technicians to operate the screw trap between April and June 2022. Please see the attached job announcement and pass it on to anyone who you think might be interested.