



**Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission  
Weekly River-Wide Teleconference  
Tuesday, May 31, 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, Indigenous 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 season

---

**People on this call:** 12

---

**Summary Notes:**

- Upcoming fishing opportunities for federally qualified subsistence users: June 1 (tomorrow), June 4, and June 8, 6am–10pm, with set gillnets that are 6" mesh, 60 feet or less in length, 45 meshes or less in depth, and spaced 150 feet apart; and June 12 and June 16, 6am–6pm, with set or drift gillnets that have 6" mesh, 45 meshes or less in depth, 150 feet or less above the Johnson River and 300 feet or less below the Johnson.
- Federal management begins June 1 at 12:01am. There are no restrictions on fishing before that time.
- KRITFC is looking for people to testify about salmon bycatch at the upcoming North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting in June.
- Avian influenza is affecting about 50% of birds on Kigigak Island, where Yukon Delta NWR is researching bird populations.
- Many people have been catching king salmon – and even sockeye already!

---

**Full Notes:**

- **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** Saw three boats out this morning, not sure if anyone's caught yet.
- Kevin Whitworth and Terese Schomogyi with KRITFC and Boyd Blihovde and Christopher Tulik with USFWS/Yukon Delta NWR introduced themselves and welcomed folks to the teleconference.

## Federal [ESA 3-KS-01-22](#)

- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Emergency special action is effective June 1 at 12:01am, so later tonight/early tomorrow. Federal management has been deemed necessary for the conservation of Chinook and chum salmon, based on provisions of ANILCA. It'll be in the main stem of the Kuskokwim River within Yukon Delta NWR. There are tributaries listed out that are closed to Chinook and chum salmon harvest and the use of all gillnets. Alternative gear types like dipnetting and rod and reel are permitted throughout the closures, with retention of Chinook and chum salmon allowed. There are 5 pre-announced fishing opportunities for federally qualified subsistence users: June 1, June 4, and June 8, 6am–10pm, with set gillnets that are 6" mesh, 60 feet or less in length, 45 meshes or less in depth, and spaced 150 feet apart; and June 12 and June 16, 6am–6pm, with set or drift gillnets that have 6" mesh, 45 meshes or less in depth, 150 feet or less above the Johnson River and 300 feet or less below the Johnson.
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** Covered this well. It might be odd for folks who are fishing right now, because anyone can be fishing with any gear right now but that ends tonight at midnight. It might be inconvenient for anyone who has a set net out right now, and they'll have to take it down tonight and reset it at 6:00am tomorrow. Just so everyone knows, our law enforcement will not be out trying to regulate that. We had law enforcement come out yesterday, and we will be out there tomorrow afternoon counting boats and nets. Hope everyone has their buoys out with their name and number. Our goal is not to come down on anyone who has their net out between today and tomorrow, but that opportunity will officially start tomorrow.
- **Christopher Tulik – Yukon Delta NWR:** Many people have been asking if there are no restrictions before June 1. They've been wondering if they can go out drifting or setting freely, with no limitations.
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** I haven't heard too many comments myself, and I can speak from my own experience. My family went out with a short net and put it in the water for 20 minutes, just to test it out, and we actually caught a king salmon yesterday. I almost fainted, because we weren't even trying. It was a 30" male, it really excited my kids and their friends. We saw about 3 other boats drifting near Bethel. Others might be able to share more information. It is perfectly legal, as long as you're following all the basic state regulations up until midnight tonight, when federal management begins.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Just so folks are aware, there will be an effort to conduct interviews by ONC and KRITFC CBHM monitors. Last year, we did this, and we estimated about 30 salmon were caught in set nets during the first opportunity.
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** Interestingly enough, I saw someone posted he had caught sockeye salmon in a whitefish net. That was surprising to me to see them around already.
- **Christopher Tulik – Yukon Delta NWR:** I went out drifting on Saturday near the Johnson River. We didn't catch anything in 10 minutes. We moved further up to the Gweek and fished about 5 minutes. The current was very strong. We didn't catch anything. My son went out yesterday evening and didn't bring back anything.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Can you give an update on water conditions down near Bethel?
- **Christopher Tulik – Yukon Delta NWR:** When I went smelt dipping last week, the tide had gone out; it was pretty low. The following day, when we went up to the same area, I noticed the bank where we went up, the water was over it. It could be due to the tides. It's gotten higher than several weeks ago.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Thanks, Chris. We get updates from the Kwethluk River screw trap crew. It was up high last week but it's started slowing down. It's been going down up here in McGrath too. Hopefully you see this downriver too. Let me share a little bit of justification for the ESA: This year, there is a forecast of 99,000–161,000 Chinook salmon, which is lower than normal, and there's been about 10 years of low runs and harvests. The Chinook salmon amount necessary for subsistence (ANS) of 67,000–110,000 fish has not been met in recent years. The chum salmon run was the lowest on

record last year. Escapement goals were not met on the Kogrukluk and George Rivers. There is no run reconstruction for chum salmon, like Chinook salmon, so we don't have any idea how many might come back. It's not looking good, though, this year.

- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** It will be hopefully a year as predicted, but we have talked with several scientists who have concerns about Chinook and chum salmon this year. The weather has been nice, and I've been appreciating the warmth, but I hope it's not going to be a hot summer with warm waters and fish dying. There are others looking at other river systems in Western Alaska who are saying the returns might not be as high as ADF&G is saying. We will need to monitor these numbers and get together with our in-season managers to discuss these.

#### **NPFMC June 2022 Meeting + Salmon Bycatch**

- **Terese Schomogyi – KRITFC:** The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) manages federal marine fisheries (3-200 miles offshore). They manage the Bering Sea pollock fishery and salmon bycatch. They will be meeting June 6-14 in Sitka and via teleconference. One item they will be discussing is salmon bycatch and marine salmon research. KRITFC and other organizations in Western/Interior Alaska are looking for testifiers who would be willing to call in and share how salmon bycatch is affecting fishing in our rivers. I am happy to help people sign up or plan their testimony. I can share talking points and materials. My number is 907-545-7388 and my email is [terese@kritfc.org](mailto:terese@kritfc.org). Some bycatch numbers, as of May 26, 2022: the pollock fleet has caught [5,184 Chinook salmon](#) and [67 chum salmon](#), which have been killed and discarded. It is still early in their season. Last year, the pollock fleet caught 14,000 Chinook salmon and almost 550,000 chum salmon. There will be information about testifying on our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) soon.

#### **USFWS Updates**

- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** Update on our Tribal consultations and visits. We went to Eek last week to give an update on fishing. Stella Alexie there organized the meeting, she did a great job. We had maybe 30-40 people come in to ask questions and listen in. They feel limited in what opportunities they have around the Eek. Being that they sit on that Eek River, they requested opportunities that are specific for them on the Eek. We are going to look into how to get them a taste of fish. Also, law enforcement and staff have resent non-salmon bearing tributary markers. They are much easier to see on the Pailleq, Johnson, Kailik, Gweek. There are still opportunities for people to catch fish, like whitefish, on those rivers, and sometimes you might catch salmon too. We talked about waterfowl issues too, like avian influenza, which is in the area and which we are concerned about as people are hunting and eggging. With salmon closures and lower numbers of salmon, we don't need any more bad news on wildlife issues, but avian influenza is here. Shows that climate change and other issues are causing the planet to take a hit. Seems like all wildlife is being affected in some way. About half the birds on Kigigak Island are showing signs of avian influenza, and these signs mean the birds are likely going to die. We are meeting with Napaskiak and Napakiak later this week as well. Fish will be on the agenda, amongst other things too.
- **Christopher Tulik – Yukon Delta NWR:** It'll be Napakiak today and Napaskiak on Thursday.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Interesting idea to explore having opportunities for Eek on their river.

#### **Closing**

- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Thanks for joining. We'll have another call next Tuesday, June 7, @10am. Feel free to contact Terese or I directly before that with any questions or comments.