



**Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission  
Weekly River-Wide Teleconference  
Tuesday, June 7, 2022 | 10am AKDT**

**Join by computer:** <https://zoom.us/j/5694903415>

**Join toll-free by phone:** 833-548-0282

**Meeting ID:** 569 490 3415

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**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

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**People on this call:** 11

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**Summary Notes:**

- Water is still fairly high. Fish are trickling in, with estimated lower river harvests of 30 kings during the 6/1 set net opportunity and 80 kings during the 6/4 set net opportunity. About 8600 fish have passed the Bethel sonar, and Bethel Test Fishery is beginning to catch salmon.
  - Not many fishermen are setting nets during the set net opportunities because the water is high, there is lots of debris, and not everyone has a 60-foot net to set. Boyd Blihovde with Yukon Delta NWR shared that the 60-foot set net regulation comes from a conservation aim during the front-end closure from June 1–11.
  - The Arctic-Yukon Kuskokwim Tribal Consortium, which includes KRITFC, and ONC have submitted letters for Area M commercial fishermen to stand down in June to let AYK-bound chum salmon pass. There has been no response from ADF&G so far.
  - Contact Terese Schomogyi at 907-545-7388 if you would like to testify about salmon bycatch at the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting this week.
  - KYUK Fish Talk will begin this Thursday, June 9, at 2pm.
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## Full Notes:

### Community & Fishing Updates

- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Seven days into federal management. Had a couple openers. Start with fishing/community updates.
- **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** 3 people have caught small jacks, 7-8 pounds, and 1 medium size 15-pound king. Trickling in, not in numbers yet.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** Didn't participate in first opener because of high water this time of year. I usually set about 2 years after the ice breaks, with a king net for the bigger sheefish. I save a lot for my dogs knowing that we'll have long periods of closures. I set my net in the morning, and it was okay, not too much debris with all the water being pushed out from strong upriver waters. Took my net out by 2:30pm, wasn't worth fighting the debris. I didn't set during the second opener knowing there would be a lot of debris, and I saw nets on a drive up to Bethel full of debris. I heard on KYUK Yuk-to-Yuk concerns from Elders who said it's too early to set. I caught 109 whitefish in Eek Lake overnight. Water levels are still high but going down. Still a lot of water coming from upriver. Haven't seen this much debris in 10 years or so.

### Lower River Harvest Estimates, June 1 and 4

- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Harvest estimate produced from 6/1, 16-hour set net opportunity: 28 interviews collected, about 30 Chinook salmon (0–80 confidence interval) harvested between Tuntutuliak and Akiak. On 6/4, 16-hour set net opportunity: 33 interviews, about 80 Chinook salmon, 40 sheefish, 120 whitefish harvested between Tuntutuliak and Akiak. Thanks to ONC, KRITFC, and USFWS for the data. Still early in the season, not many interviews, and not many nets out.
- **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** Did aerial surveys count how many boats were on the river.
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** I did the first survey, and it was around 30 nets. Pretty low participation on a weekday, lots of debris. More nets on Saturday 6/4, maybe around 80. We flew just one flight each of those days. During the drift opportunities, we will do 2 flights, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. We fly those aerial surveys from Bethel downriver on both banks, then upriver to the airport in Akiak, around the Kuskokuak Slough, and back to Bethel.

### Set Net Length Regulations

- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** For the past decade or so, Tribes and others have been asking USFWS to take over management for conservation. During the first year, we had a tough time with USFWS. Akiak is infamous for the nets being cut by USFWS trooper. A lot of people from this area are penny-pinching to pay for such gear. We've come a long way to adjust to 60 feet of set net. I believe I've voiced this before. There are people who cannot afford to buy a 60-foot net. To halve a net to 75 feet – what's it to management that they require us to use 60 feet? My people are being criminalized for the very thing I grew up knowing. This is not a commercial fishing event. I understand citing for king gear. There should be an allowance because people in the villages don't have employees, and they get fined from USFWS or ADF&G. That \$100 fine should have gone to fuel or net repair. I hope Boyd takes this into consideration. We've entrusted USFWS to take care of our management because in 2013 ADFG failed

us. Don't tell us you don't have enough data to preliminary forecast fish coming in. I'm not a scientist but I know kings return 5-7 years, chums after 4, reds every couple years. I would like ADFG, USFWS, to stop criminalizing us and work with us. Most people can afford 150 foot net, that's \$800 right there. We can't continue to spend money to meet these regulations. Adjust to them. Thank you.

- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** This came up before we started the June 1 conservation period. We had different requests. Some were to have longer net lengths allowed, others said we shouldn't allow fishing at all during the front-end closure, because it was originally created to let fish go upriver. We had some conflicting openers that allowed for whitefish during the front-end closure. These set net opportunities are really meant for whitefish while allowing salmon to move upriver, to Aniak and beyond. It's been a tradition to allow fishing. The reason for the 60-foot net is to continue being conservative and cautious. I hope no one is cutting their net or buying a net just for this period. I'm not an expert, but I understand most people advise taking a 100- or 150-foot net and bunch the extra on the bank. It's bank oriented during the front-end closure. I know it's inconvenient and not very effective, but people here on lower and upper river agree it was good to have a front-end closure to let fish go up to their spawning grounds. Then, the idea is to have effective fishing with drifting starting mid-June, or June 12. The real intent is to have the river closed now to get fish upriver. It's too late for this year, but maybe next season we can talk about using longer nets during the front-end set net openers, if it won't be a conservation concern for kings.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** My friend and I in McGrath have been trying to buy nets, but where we normally go is completely sold out until next year. Not sure where these nets are going. It's difficult to buy a net right now.
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** Also, the law enforcement part of that is concerning to me. Just about every village we go to, we hear about law enforcement being disrespectful, rude, unfair. I want to repeat on this call, please, if you have your phone on you and you see a law enforcement officer cutting a net or taking fish out of net, take a photo. That's a way to prove that somebody is doing inappropriate stuff. There's new law enforcement coming in, and they don't work directly for me or Yukon Delta, but we will be having an orientation. I will share Mr. Alexie's comments with them. They are mostly writing warnings now since it's early. We've been telling them to be lenient.

### Area M Fisheries Stand Down Update

- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** Question for Savannah, with ADFG?
- **Savannah Hollingworth – ADF&G:** I am the in-season coordinator with Kuskokwim Area.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** Glad to see ADFG here because I requested you all be present. I am wondering if there has been a response to the request for Area M to stand down during the chum salmon passage. Do you know if Area M will stand down until at least 500,000-700,000 chums have passed? Last year, I watched them fish with no consideration for our fish. I know they're targeting reds, but they caught 2.2 million chums, and I believe half that were bound for Yukon and Kuskokwim River. Yukon has been struggling for nearly 30 years, and their chums are being affected. We are spiritually connected to the things we hunt and gather. I never believed that, until we started conservation mode. I see what my Elders were talking about. I long for fish. I am waiting for agencies who manage. Just a few days seems like an eternity to me. We've come a long way; KRITFC with Yukon Delta NWR lets us know when those openings will be, and we prepare for those days.

- **Savannah Hollingworth – ADF&G:** I know ONC has petitioned to the State about Area M. I am trying to stay updated on the news, but don't know what actions the State has taken. A good opportunity to talk to Nick Smith about this would be at the Working Group meeting. I can pass on that information. Those happen every Wednesday, 10am-12pm this season.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** The Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Tribal Consortium, made of AVCP, TCC, Kawerak, KRITFC, and YRITFC, and representing 118 Tribes, all wrote a letter to the Area M management to have the Area M fleet stand down in June. Nick Smith doesn't have authority there because he's on the Kuskokwim. The guys with management in Area M are out of Kodiak in the westward region. I'm told that by ADFG here on the Kuskokwim. We haven't heard back from that letter that's been sent. We will try to keep you informed if we do hear back. Most of the chum salmon happens in June, so now. We should hear back soon.
- **Savannah Hollingworth – ADF&G:** The Board of Fish deals somewhat with this too, but they only have certain authority, too. There are so many agencies that have to be involved, and that is part of the issue.

### Upcoming Fishing and ADF&G Fish Data

- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** There is another set net opportunity tomorrow, 6/8. It starts at 6am to 10pm for set nets only. Also, there are 2 preannounced drift net opportunities on June 12 and June 16. They are 6am to 6pm. Normally, we see more harvest on those drift net opportunities, and the fishery ramps up then.
- **Steven Alexie – Napaskiak:** Been in contact with Bethel Test Fishery and sonar?
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** I get daily updates from BTF and sonar. The data is just starting to trickle in. Season total to about 8600 fish at the sonar site, and 8 kings with TF.
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** Haven't gotten those numbers yet.
- **Savannah Hollingworth – ADF&G:** Will be sending materials for the Working Group meeting today. The Bethel Test Fish numbers are online and up to date.

### North Pacific Fishery Management Council: Testify on Salmon Bycatch

- **Terese Schomogyi – KRITFC:** The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is meeting this week. They manage federal marine fisheries off the coast of Alaska, including salmon bycatch in those commercial fisheries. Bycatch update: as of June 2, 5,184 Chinook salmon and 67 chum salmon have been reported as bycatch in the Bering Sea-Aleutian Island pollock fishery. It's still early for chum salmon, as most are caught in the B season, which begins June 11. We are looking for people to testify at the Council meeting this week about how salmon bycatch is affecting you and your way of life. Please give me a call at 907-545-7388 if you would like information or help signing up for testimony. They don't give times for testifying, it's just when they get to it on their agenda, but my best guess is it'll be between Friday and Monday. I will be monitoring the meeting so you don't have to, and I'll let you know when to call in and speak. Please share this information with your friends and Tribal Councils.
- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** Can you share a written testimony from a Council member in Napaskiak who can't make the meeting?

- **Terese Schomogyi – KRITFC:** Yes, share with me and I will communicate with their staff to do this.

### **Fish Talk and In-Season Projects**

- **Boyd Blihovde – Yukon Delta NWR:** We will also have KYUK Fish Talk starting this Thursday 6/9 at 2pm. That's another opportunity for a sort of public testimony. Our staff and Kevin are planning to call in.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Nick Smith from ADFG is also invited.
- **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** KRITFC and USFWS are ramping up our field projects. We are getting supplies and hiring ready at Takotna River weir, it'll begin soon. Water in Takotna is still high but is coming down. Kwethluk River weir is installed and it's just waiting for the crew to show up. They should be here in a week or two. We will wrap up the screw trap in the next few weeks. Sonar and BTF, the ADFG projects, are getting data trickling in. Right now, it's still a little bit early.