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**Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission**

**Weekly River-Wide Teleconference**

**Tuesday, June 21, 2022 | 10am AKDT**

**Join by computer:** [https://zoom.us/j/5694903415](https://zoom.us/j/5694903415?fbclid=IwAR0Qra4bTh8OTX_3lixFS8P8p6lemmr02aDSsbCna7JxDqzX1CWofFaNxTk)

**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:** 6

**Summary Notes:**

**Community / Fishing Updates**

* **Paul Cleveland – Quinhagak:** We are open every day down here except Sundays. There have been some people from up north coming down and fishing on Sundays. Don’t know if we need to make another announcement about not fishing on Sundays. Looks like about two-thirds of the fish racks around here are getting filled up; some that are giving it an effort are getting some, but others have yet to start. The word is that after the weekend, they’re starting to say that they’re catching more reds than kings. We’ll see how that goes. I’m open to questions.
* **Barbara Johnson – Native Village of Georgetown:** Based in Anchorage, haven’t been fishing.
* **Fritz Charles – Bethel:** Went out to the Bay on Saturday and brought home about 74 fish. It was between the lines of the mouth and Quinhagak. Got 26 reds and 4 chums, and some kings. The fish are headed this way, should be a really good opener tomorrow.
* **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** In McGrath, a few people have set nets out. The fish are just starting to trickle in. The water is coming up and debris is coming out of the creeks. I’ve heard of a few fish being caught. A friend of mine invited me to check his two set nets; caught a sheefish on one and a whitefish on another. He’s been catching only whitefish and sheefish. We tried drifting for about an hour and a half, didn’t catch anything.

**Federal Fishing Management Actions**

* **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** A [new federal special action](https://www.kuskosalmon.org/s/3-KS-02-22-FINAL-6_18_22.pdf) went out on June 18. There are two fishing opportunities: (1) the Kalskag bluff line is open to the use of gillnets by Federally qualified subsistence users starting yesterday, June 20, from 6:00am onward. It’s been opened around this time in years past. Also, (2) there is an opportunity for Federally qualified subsistence users on June 22 from 6:00am to 6:00pm from the mouth to the Kalskag bluffs. It has justification in the special action. In the past, we’ve liked to have a little more time between announcing openers, but we had to take into consideration the opener on June 16 and looking at the data from that opportunity. It takes about 24 hours from the opportunity ending to crunching the numbers for the harvest estimates; plus we have to look at numbers from Bethel Test Fish and Bethel sonar. KRITFC and Yukon Delta NWR met about 36 hours late on Friday night for about 3 hours to look at these numbers and discuss our management. At the last opener on 6/16, there were about 7,680 king salmon caught.

**Bycatch and Intercept Numbers/Management**

* **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Bering Sea bycatch numbers. As of June 16, there were 5,202 king salmon and 98 chum salmon caught. Area M intercept as of June 19 has caught about 205,000 chum salmon so far. This is mostly in the South Islands/Peninsula June fishery.
* **Fritz Charles – Bethel:** I’ve been fishing this river for my whole life, and we’re the most regulated people in the river. I guess I’m preaching to a choir, but these bycatch numbers are way too many. We have to stop blaming who’s who and start going after these trawlers. I mentioned a few days ago that pretty soon there’s going to be an outright civil war. With the type of government we have nowadays, we’re not going to get anywhere. These bycatch numbers are way too high. End users are the ones to suffer, and we only take what we need. Our ancestors managed this river themselves; we didn’t go to the federal or state government. We need to get back to that. I don’t want to see any lives lost because of subsistence restrictions we have. We need to get this under control. Even one fish bycaught is one too many, because it could come up here and spawn. Need to send someone to the United Nations. Look at Washington and Oregon; they don’t have any fish down there, and that’s where we’re heading. When are we going to wake up and smell the roses? Someone needs to take charge of our fisheries and subsistence rights. Let’s do something about it, not just talk about it. Thank you.
* **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Well-put, Fritz. We just had a meeting this morning with a Bering Sea fisher group about the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.
  + **Terese Schomogyi – KRITFC**: This Bering Sea Discussion group sent people from Kawerak, TCC, AVCP, KRITFC down to Sitka for the NPFMC meeting. We all carried the ask of 0 Chinook and chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. The Council didn’t take that action and instead called for industry chum avoidance measures, more research, and, maybe the one hopeful thing, a working group with Tribes, scientists, and industry to address the salmon crisis.
  + **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Also, the AYK Tribal Consortium made of AVCP, TCC, Kawerak, KRITFC, and YRITFC wrote a letter to Area M Seiners Association to ask them to halt fishing in the June salmon fishing industry so we can try to get some salmon to the AYK region. They responded by basically saying they don’t think the Area M or pollock fishery are major contributors to AYK salmon declines. They denied their part in it. But they do say that salmon are important to Kuskokwim people, like we all know. Obviously, they are fishing and catching chum salmon as we speak.
* **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** Fritz said we are suffering on the Kuskokwim. Jim Simon has done some digging into historical harvest data, and he’s shown that everyone along the river is suffering. There is not one community doing better or worse than another. We are all suffering. We are getting about 20% of what we used to. Per capita, we are all getting way less fish that we need, which adds to food insecurity issues in the river. And now we have bycatch issues in the mix.

**Project Update**

* **Kevin Whitworth – KRITFC:** We wrapped up our screw trap project for the spring, with the spring migration of smolt going out. The equipment is out of the river, and we will be writing reports and looking at what those numbers tell us soon. Kwethluk River weir should be running soon, we had some Covid issues with the crew lead coming out of Kenai that stalled it. The Takotna River weir should be going soon, too.