



**Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Weekly River-Wide Teleconference
Tuesday, June 28, 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: 11

Summary Notes:

- Announced yesterday (June 27), there are two 36-hour set net periods coming up on the lower river.
- Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon are not doing very well this year. Chum salmon are record low. Sockeye salmon are coming in okay and picking up more now. The red salmon peak is traditionally around July 4.
- Over 400,000 chum salmon have been intercepted by Area M commercial fishermen. Many of those are bound for Western Alaska. KRITFC along with other regional Tribal organizations has submitted a proposal to the Board of Fish to restrict Area M June fisheries. The BOF will meet in February 2023 in Anchorage. Kuskokwim fishermen have been upset and speaking out against bycatch for many years.
- Subsistence fishing near Quinhagak is closed on Sundays and gear is restricted to 6-inch mesh, 300 foot long nets.

Welcome

- Adolph: Weather here in Tuntutuliak is cloudy, 55°, and wind 5 mph. We've had good weather the past few days, even though it's cloudy.
- Kevin: Welcome to our weekly teleconference. Introduces self and KRITFC staff.

- Boyd: Hello from Yukon Delta NWR. Introduces self and staff.
- Tommy Sheridan (in chat): Hi everyone. I live in Cordova, Alaska, on the ancestral lands of the Eyak people. I currently serve on the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission, and on the Alaska Governor's Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force. I'm here to listen and learn. Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

Fishing Updates

- Kevin: How is your fishing going, and how was the June 22 opportunity for you? Our harvest estimate from our village monitoring crew, ONC in Bethel area, and USFWS aerial surveys estimates about 14,000 king salmon, 950 chum salmon, and 13,700 red salmon harvested for a total of about 28,000 salmon caught in the lower river. Also, as of June 27, another [emergency special action](#) came out that begins tomorrow, June 29, at 6:00 am. It has 2 36-hour set gillnet opportunities: (1) June 29 at 6:00 am to June 30 at 6:00 pm, and (2) July 3 at 6:00 am to July 4 at 6:00 pm. Set nets must be 6-inch or less mesh, no longer than 75 feet, and operated perpendicular to the bank.
- Adolph: We are happy about those set net opportunities. Down here in Tunt, the fish are swimming, and they're catching more reds, and a few chums. July 3 and 4 has been in the past the peak for chums. It's close by now. People need to hang more reds. After July 4, we'll be hoping to get more fishing, maybe more drifting. It's up to the In-Season Managers and biologists to decide.
- Kevin: Just so everyone knows, KRITFC and Yukon Delta NWR are meeting today to discuss more fishing. A little bit of data: The Chinook salmon run is about 60% complete, and the harvest is about 33,000 Chinook salmon throughout the river. You all know this is well-below the historic harvest subsistence catch, which is normally 88,000 to 120,000. The Bethel sonar project has passed about 81,000 Chinook salmon as of June 26. As Adolph said, there are few chum salmon. At this point, chum salmon are usually around the 25% mark, but not this year. The sonar passage for chum salmon is [800] at this point. Harvest is way down. They are looking as bad or worse than 2021. 2019 was a low run, and we didn't think chum salmon could get lower in 2020, but it did. Not good at all. Sockeye on the other hand are doing okay. About 35% of the run is complete at this time. Harvest at the last opener was pretty good.

Salmon Intercept, Bycatch, and Board of Fish Meetings

- Kevin: As of June 26, the Area M intercept of chum salmon is over 400,000 fish. We know many of these are bound for the AYK region, which makes this harvest hard to swallow because we are looking at a disaster for chum salmon. These fish are still making their way through that region and fishermen are still harvesting down there. A manager down there anticipates another 100,000 chums will be caught. KRITFC asked for their fishery to be halted, and that request was denied. Chum salmon on the Yukon are not looking good, on the Kuskokwim not looking good, and Norton Sound hasn't had a chum salmon run in a long time. Last year, Bering Sea bycatch was over 500,000 chums. KRITFC asked for the NPFMC to set a bycatch cap and that was denied.
- Adolph: On the Yup'ik talk show on KYUK, lots of people call in about bycatch. We know that the salmon being bycaught, we are not content with those bycatchers. People are really unhappy and want to do something about it. We are at unrest. I hope we find a way for the Area M bycatchers to hear us pleading no more bycatch. Quyanana.

- Kevin: This issue isn't new. In the early 2000s, there was an effort to limit that area from catching some of these fish bound for Western Alaska. There were regulations put in place that helped, but those regulations have gone away since, for almost 20 years. Right now, they're open seining as we speak.
- Boyd: I appreciate that you all are doing so much at the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meetings, and also getting other people to comment. That's been a valuable thing. At government employees at USFWS, we can't do this, but we all feel the same way.
- Jim Simon: KRITFC did submit a BOF proposal to restore those restrictions in Area M that BOF will address in February of 2023.
- Kevin: What is the BOF meeting in October?
- Jim: This is a work session where they will review escapement goals and stocks of concern. In February 2023, BOF will take up Area M. That's after our January AYK meeting.
- Tommy Sheridan (in chat): [Alaska Peninsula / Aleutian Island / Chignik Finfish Board of Fisheries](#) meeting is from February 13-17, 2023 in Anchorage. Comment due date is January 30, 2023.
- Jennifer Hooper: Were any proposals submitted for the Kuskokwim to change anything?
- Jim: There were 2 proposals submitted for the AYK meeting by KRITFC to add regulatory language that the State wouldn't open up weekly opportunities when the Federal government is managing in Federal waters. Those are the only 2 in-river proposals submitted by KRITFC for the BOF.
- Kevin: KRITFC will be working with the public and other Tribal organizations to get as many people as we can to testify at that meeting regarding the Area M fishery.
- Jennifer: I think people are starting to get prepared and planning for a big front at that meeting. I think there should be a lot of us there.
- Jim: TCC Tribal Resource Stewardship Program also submitted a similar proposal to restore protections in Area M or to eliminate the interception of AYK bound salmon. In short, KRITFC, AVCP, and TCC are all trying to do what we can to fix these issues taking our fish, but it's all falling on deaf ears at this point.
- Adolph: This year, I haven't heard about complaining from this village or other villages about the test fishing spots. This is the first season that the test fishing spots are peaceful. I'm very thankful for upcoming 2023 BOF meetings that will address the Area M, and I'm happy about AVCP helping us out to do something about it.
- Kevin: I am constantly asked why our river is restricted when Area M and Bering Sea trawlers are allowed to fish. It's hard to be an in-river fisherman and be so restricted. Meanwhile, fisheries like the Bering Sea trawl fishery are allowed to fish 10 months out of the year, in their A and B seasons.
- Jennifer Hooper: An FYI for you all and folks on the river and in the region. We are working on getting some laymen's terms informational reports on some of the aspects of the pollock fishery. We're looking at focusing on the genetics and AEQ analyses, as well as information on the industry, their incentive program, and the mandates they follow for Chinook salmon right now. Hopefully in a few weeks, we'll be taking snippets from those reports and sharing general information for people. I took see comments about the trawl fisheries every day, and questions on what they do. It will be good to get basic information out for people to see and help understand.
- Kevin: Thank you for that update. If you want help compiling that, let me or Terese know.
- Adolph: I appreciate having Jennifer working on that analysis of the industry and general information. Those help me understand. It will help my people in the village and along the Kuskokwim.
- Tommy: I've been wanting to attend this meeting for a while, thanks for making this opportunity. A lot of these issues – bycatch and Western Alaska salmon fishery management issues – are new to me, so

I'm just looking for opportunities to learn. I also have covid today, so I'll be off camera and muted to not be a distraction. Contact information: tommysheridan@ymail.com, 907-429-8999.

- Kevin: Thanks for being here. We hold these calls every Tuesday. There's also a radio show on KYUK. The next one is Thursday June 30 at 2:00 pm. Basically, KRITFC, USFWS, and ADF&G are on a panel and get questions and talk with people from the river for a couple hours. This teleconference or that radio show are good ways to learn and hear from people.

Other

- Kevin: Any other comments?
- LaMont: Have hear from our village monitors that not everyone will be setting nets during these next opportunities. Seems like as you go up the river, people are more satisfied to less satisfied. We will be meeting this afternoon with USFWS to decide on more fishing.
- Adolph: My fellow commissioner down in Quinhagak, Paul Cleveland, looks like they need more help to enforce their fishing on the ocean on Sundays. Subsistence fishing is closed on Sundays and people are fishing with 8-inch gear. When things happen like this, people talk to me. We are all connected, and if it's hurting someone on our river, it hurts me. It would be good to have more enforcers there.
- Kevin: Thank you, Adolph. I'll pass this information on to Nick Smith and the ADF&G area manager down there.
- Paul: Terese sent out a notice with the KRITFC Facebook, noting that fishing is closed on Sunday and that there are gear restrictions. I contacted ADF&G and haven't heard back from them. Fishing is good down here, the tides are strong, like 13 feet. One of my friends did a 10- or 15-minute soak and got about 170 fish. My goodness, that's a lot of fish for a short soak time.
- Kevin: Was that sockeye he caught mostly?
- Paul: I think a mix, but a lot of sockeye are here mostly. People are saying they're catching larger kings than before.
- Adolph: July 4 is always the peak season for the chums and reds. Before the restrictions, when we don't have enough king salmon, we used to go down to Quinhagak to hang more fish for the winter. Like if we catch about 50, if we have 50 fish hanging, and our goal is 80, we go down to catch more salmon. That was in the past. Now we don't do that for sustaining the fish.
- Kevin: Thank you Adolph. I appreciate hearing the history of what fishing used to be like.

Wrap-Up

- Kevin: Thank you all for calling in. The next call is a week from today, or July 5 at 10:00 am. Be safe out there and good luck fishing.