



2014 Kuskokwim River Salmon Fisheries Chinook Salmon Conservation Management Strategies Within Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

This information sheet describes anticipated management strategies for the 2014 season.

2014 Kuskokwim Salmon Outlook

The Chinook salmon return to the Kuskokwim River in 2014 is expected to be weak and below normal; significant conservation efforts restricting harvest will be necessary to meet escapement goals. The best preseason estimate is for the return to be between 71,000 and 117,000. The midpoint of this range is 94,000, comparable to the run size in 2013—the lowest on record. The midpoint of this expected run size is within just a few thousand fish of the midpoint of the drainage-wide escapement goal; thus we expect little or no harvestable surplus of Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon in 2014. The following conservation strategies to meet escapement describe probable management options for pre-season planning purposes. Strategies and actions may change, however, based on in-season run assessment.

Proposed Management Strategies

- Early fishing opportunity will be provided to target non-salmon species, such as sheefish and whitefish, before many Chinook salmon enter the river.
- To protect Chinook salmon, subsistence fishing for salmon will be closed, beginning in late May in Districts 1 and 2, and continuing chronologically upriver to the Yukon Delta refuge border near Aniak. During this subsistence salmon fishing closure, 4-inch set gillnets not exceeding 60-feet in length will be allowed to target non-salmon species. Set gillnet is defined as a gillnet that has been intentionally set, staked, anchored, or otherwise fixed.
- In the middle of June, when chum and sockeye salmon become abundant, subsistence fishing opportunities using dip nets will be provided; Chinook salmon captured by dip net must not be removed from the water and must be released from the dip net immediately.
- Depending on the success of early-season conservation measures and compliance, a very limited opportunity may be provided in mid-June so that communities can continue their cultural and social practice of harvesting Chinook salmon. Between one and a few dozen Chinook salmon may be allocated per village via permit.
- Depending on in-season run assessment (run strength, run timing, and the relative abundance of chum and sockeye compared to Chinook salmon), openings for chum and sockeye using 6" mesh may be initiated during the last week of June in the lowest sections of the river and open in the upriver sections based on salmon migratory timing. These fishing periods will likely be limited in time to reduce incidental harvest of Chinook salmon. Gill net length may also be limited to 25 fathoms for conservation purposes depending upon the in-season run assessment.
- Subsistence restrictions can be relaxed after the Chinook salmon run has passed or if confidence is high that the run is much better than anticipated.