



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management
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Federal Subsistence Board

1011 East Tudor Road, MS 121
Anchorage, AK 99503-6199



Forest Service

Kuskokwim River Federal Public Waters Closed to Gill Nets and the Harvest of Chinook, Chum, and Coho Salmon

TEMPORARY SPECIAL ACTION

Under Authority of: 36 CFR 242.10 and .19
50 CFR 100.10 and .19

Temporary Special Action No: FSA-YD-25-01

Issued at: Bethel, AK May 12, 2025

Effective Date: June 1, 2025, 12:01 AM

Expiration Date August 31, 2025, 11:59 PM or until superseded by special action

EXPLANATION:

The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR) Manager has determined that Federal management is necessary for the conservation and the continuation of subsistence uses for Chinook, Chum, and Coho Salmon within the Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River drainage in 2025. This action is based on the provisions of Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and delegation of authority letter from the Federal Subsistence Board. The Federal in-season manager intends to use an adaptive management approach to manage the salmon fishery from June 1st to August 31st, 2025. As part of this approach, the YDNWR will continue the partnership with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) and will coordinate with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), and other local partners.

REGULATION: 50 CFR 100.27(e)(4)(ii) is amended to read:

(A) Unless re-opened by the YDNWR Manager, the following federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge are closed to the use of gill nets and the harvest of Chinook, Chum, and Coho Salmon by all users from June 01, 2025 at 12:01 a.m. to August 31, 2025 at 11:59 p.m.:

(1) The Kuskokwim River main stem within the boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge.

(2) The following tributaries/areas are closed:



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- *The Eek River.*
- *The Kwethluk River drainage beginning at its confluence with Kuskokuak Slough.*
- *The Kasigluk and Kisaralik River drainages including Old Kuskokuak Slough to ADF&G regulatory markers at the confluence of Old Kuskokuak Slough and Kuskokuak Slough.*
- *The Tuluksak River drainage including its confluence with the Kuskokwim River and downstream approximately 1-mile to ADF&G regulatory markers.*
- *The Aniak River drainage within the Yukon Delta NWR boundary (on the Aniak River, starting about 500 yards upstream of the Aniak / Kuskokwim Rivers confluence up stream to near the Aniak / Buckstock Rivers confluence).*
- *The Aniak box defined as: The waters of the Kuskokwim River main stem from the Yukon Delta NWR boundary at Aniak downstream to a line formed from the northwest corner of the runway (latitude 61° 35' 16" N, longitude 159° 33' 28" W), due north to a point on the southeast corner of the sandbar (latitude 61° 35' 37" N, longitude 159° 33' 16" W).*

Fishing from tributaries not listed above is restricted to fishing 100 yards upriver from the mouth of the river (confluence with the main stem Kuskokwim River).

- (B) *For non-federally qualified users: The use of gill nets and the retention of Chinook, Chum, and Coho salmon is not allowed. The retention of Sockeye Salmon and other non-salmon species utilizing means and methods other than a gill net are allowed as defined under the State of Alaska fishing regulations.*
- (C) *For federally qualified subsistence users: Dip nets, beach seines*, fish wheels, and rod and reel will remain open throughout the closure and retention of all salmon (and other non-salmon species) is allowed within the main stem of the Kuskokwim River. Retention of Chinook, Chum, and Coho salmon within the tributaries is not allowed. Sockeye Salmon (and other non-salmon species) can be retained within the tributaries. Gill net opportunities within the main stem Kuskokwim River may be announced.*

**Beach seines are defined as non-monofilament webbing, 50 fathoms in length, 100 meshes in depth, and no greater than three and one-half inches stretched webbing.*

JUSTIFICATION:

The closure of Federal public waters to the use of gill nets and the harvest of Chinook, Chum, and Coho salmon beginning June 1 is based on conservation concerns throughout the Kuskokwim River drainage. The Federal in-season manager may announce openings to federally qualified subsistence users when salmon run strength and timing permit, while balancing the need for conservation and providing opportunities for the continuation of subsistence uses.

The 2025 Kuskokwim River Chinook Salmon forecast is for a range of 136,000 - 217,000 fish.



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Historical, and mostly unrestricted, harvest levels were 67,200 – 109,800 Chinook (data from years 1990 – 2009). Therefore, based on the anticipated run size, prior years of low productivity, and subsistence need, harvest restrictions will be necessary to meet a sustainable drainage-wide escapement goal.

Chum Salmon numbers for 2024 were higher than the last four years average but still well below historic harvests and returns. The final 2024 CPUE for Chum Salmon was 5,981. The 2022 and 2023 final CPUE were at 2,168 and 4,289, respectively. The end-of-season estimated passage at the Kuskokwim River sonar was 254,448 Chum Salmon compared to 251,542 in 2023 and 103,864 in 2022. Due to the recent steep population declines and high uncertainty of the strength of the last four years of the Chum Salmon run, restrictions are necessary to protect Chum Salmon within the Kuskokwim River drainage.

The primary metric used for in-season management for Coho Salmon in 2024 was CPUE from the Bethel Test Fishery as the Kuskokwim River Sonar project ceased operations on July 25th. Apart from 2023, all Coho CPUE since 2018 fell below the long-term (2008-2023) average. While BTF suggests that Coho returns in 2024 were probably the second highest in the last seven years, BTF also suggests those years (2018-2024) account for the 6 worst Coho returns since 2008. Therefore, a conservative approach to Coho Salmon management is warranted due to the uncertainty of the health of the run.

Restricting the use of gillnets during June through August is intended to conserve Chinook, Chum, and Coho salmon. However, it is recognized that Sockeye Salmon, which overlap with mostly Chinook and Chum salmon runs, have generally increased in number. Therefore, consideration will be given to providing harvest opportunities to target abundant Sockeye Salmon while minimizing impacts to other salmon species.

Alternative gear types including dip nets, beach seines, fish wheels, and rod and reel are intended to allow people to catch abundant Sockeye Salmon during the gill net closure. Federally qualified subsistence users that retain all salmon species using these methods are expected to have minimal impact.

A public hearing on the proposal to close the Kuskokwim River drainage to the use of gill nets and the harvest of Chinook, Chum, and Coho salmon was held on April 23, 2025. Some comments were in support of the temporary special action to close the Kuskokwim River drainage starting June 1, 2025. Others were in opposition to restricting subsistence users from fishing. Most public comments were of concern as to why salmon numbers were low. Public testimony shared at this meeting was considered when making the final determination.

Federal Subsistence Board by delegation to:

Spencer Rearden
Kuskokwim River In-Season Manager
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge



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