



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

PO Box 346

Bethel, AK 99559



Emergency Special Action No.: 3-KS-05-22

Issued at: Bethel, Alaska July 7, 2022

Effective Date:

July 9, 2022

6:00 a.m.

Federal Public Waters of the Kuskokwim River: Subsistence Fishing Announcement

Pursuant to authority delegated by the Federal Subsistence Board, the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager, as In-Season Manager, hereby announces an additional fishing opportunity for Federally qualified subsistence users. This additional opening reflects revisions to Emergency Special Action (ESA) 3-KS-01-22, issued May 02, 2022, which closed certain waters within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR) to the harvest of salmon and certain fishing methods in order to ensure the continued viability of, and subsistence use of Chinook and Chum Salmon. ESA 3-KS-02-22 announced on June 18, 2022, allowed for an additional drift net opportunity, and opened gillnet fishing upstream of Kalskag Bluffs. ESA 3-KS-03-22 announced on June 27th 2022 provided for set net opportunities. Finally, ESA 3-KS-04-22 opened the Aniak Closed Area (Aniak Box) to rod and reel fishing for Chinook Salmon, while leaving that area closed to all other means and methods. Since that time, the In-Season manager has continued to review data and information reported by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and other parties and has engaged in numerous discussions with stakeholders concerning the prospect of providing additional harvest opportunities.

The data indicates that this season's Chinook Salmon run is similar to the 2021 run. However, the data also indicates, and ADF&G and the Kuskokwim Inter-Tribal Fish Commission agree, that limited re-openings can be provided without jeopardizing the viability of future Chinook salmon runs. At this point there are limited concerns over Chinook due to the estimated 92% run passage past Bethel and Sonar counts showing high escapement estimates. However, the concern for Chum Salmon has now reached its peak and is guiding these decisions and harvest opportunities.

Chum Salmon numbers are critically low in the Kuskokwim River, with numbers tracking similarly to 2020 (a very low year). The YDNWR and Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission continue to support a conservative approach. An analysis of Bethel Sonar (operated by ADF&G) indicates that about 80% of the salmon composition in the lower Kuskokwim are Sockeye Salmon as of July 4th, 2022. This high number of Sockeye Salmon are the target of these announced opportunities. The harvest is further justified by a reduction in fishing pressure; relative to earlier in the salmon season (we estimate that there will be 150 drift nets and 40 set nets observed) and the closure periods (5-6 days per week) are far greater than the harvest periods (1 or 2 days of harvest each week). This conservation approach is to allow for higher levels of Chum Salmon escapement.

The subsections below describe these additional openings and reiterate certain key closures and restrictions instituted by 3-KS-01-22 that remain in effect.



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Federally Qualified Subsistence Fishing Opportunities:

(1) Drift gillnet opportunities for Federally qualified subsistence users will be open in Federal public waters in the main stem of the Kuskokwim River (downstream of Kalskag Bluffs) during the following dates and times:

- **July 9, 2022 from 06:00 am to 6:00 pm**

During this opportunity, subsistence users will be allowed to use gillnets with 6-inch or less mesh which may not exceed 45 meshes in depth. Gillnets utilized in areas above the Johnson River may not exceed 25 fathoms (150 feet) in length, and gillnets utilized in areas below the Johnson River may not exceed 50 fathoms (300 feet) in length. Set gillnets need to be spaced 150 feet apart from another set gillnet. The salmon bearing tributaries listed in ESA 3-KS-01-22 will remain closed to the use of all gillnets for all salmon and all methods and means for Chinook salmon to all users during this period.

(2) Set Gillnet Opportunity:

- **July 10, 2022 from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm**
- **July 16, 2022 from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm**

Set gillnets are restricted to 6-inch or less mesh, may not exceed 75 feet in length and 45 meshes in depth. Set gillnets may not be operated more than 100 feet from the ordinary high-water mark, (the bank/shoreline where vegetation is growing), must be attached to the bank, and substantially fished perpendicular to shore.

Alternative Methods- Nothing in ESA 3-KS-01-22 or the present action prohibits the use of alternative methods of fishing (including use of hook and line, dip net, beach seine, and fish wheels) except for the tributary details mentioned below.

Tributary Details- The following Federal public waters within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge remain closed to the harvest of Chinook Salmon and the use of all gillnets by all users:

- **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 to ADF&G regulatory markers at its confluence with the**



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Kuskokwim River; and

- **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). The Aniak Box was opened to rod and reel fishing for Chinook Salmon with ESA-3-KS-04-22.**

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).

Access up-to-date information on fishing opportunities by calling 907-543-3151 or visit the Refuge [Facebook](#) page or www.fws.gov/refuge/yukon_delta/.

By delegation from the Federal Subsistence Board:

Boyd Bluhovde, Refuge Manager
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

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