



Overview of Yukon River Federal Fishery Special Action Request FSA 23-02



THE FEDERAL SUBSISTENCE BOARD HAS BEEN SENT A SPECIAL ACTION REQUEST ASKING THE BOARD TO:

Close the Federal public waters of the Yukon River drainage to the harvest of Chinook, Chum and coho Salmon except by federally qualified subsistence users and

Require that Federal subsistence fishing schedules, openings, closures and methods be determined by the Federal Fisheries Manager.

THE BOARD HAS DELEGATED THIS REQUEST TO THE YUKON INSEASON FISHERIES MANAGER

Please share your comments or concerns on the proposed management strategy with the inseason manager. These concerns will be summarized and shared with the Federal Subsistence Board.

PUBLIC HEARING BY TELECONFERENCE:

May 4, 2023, 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. (Or until conclusion of public comments).

888-455-7761 Passcode: **1124353**

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact Holly Carroll, Yukon River in-season fisheries manager at (907) 351-3029, holly_carroll@fws.gov regarding management.

Please contact Brooke McDavid at the Office of Subsistence Management at (907) 891-9181, brooke_mcdavid@fws.gov regarding the public hearing.

Visit Office of Subsistence management Fisheries Special Actions page for a fact sheet:
<https://www.doi.gov/subsistence/fisheries-special-actions>

BACKGROUND AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

HOW WAS FEDERAL MANAGEMENT DONE LAST YEAR IN 2022?

- The Federal and State management team reviewed all incoming assessment data. Once consensus decisions were made by the State and Federal management team, the Federal manager contacted Regional Advisory Council chairs about upcoming management actions and then issued News releases in collaboration with Alaska

Department of Fish and Game. We hope that this avoids confusion about fishing schedules, and why restrictions or closures may be necessary.

- The Federal managers have a combined 30 years of experience, and we actively managed the fishery by bringing the local knowledge from fishermen and Tribes to the decision-making process; prioritizing subsistence fishing when commercial fisheries for other abundant species are considered; advocating for as much annual subsistence harvest *that can be sustained biologically* to maintain important cultural and spiritual practices.

SALMON OUTLOOKS:

	Chinook	Summer Chum	Fall Chum	Coho
Outlook:	Poor	Poor	Poor	Below average
Escapement:	Unlikely to meet goals	Potential to meet goals	Unlikely to meet goals	N/A
Subsistence:	Fishing Closures	Fishing Closures and Restrictions	Fishing Closures and Restrictions	Fishing Restrictions
Sport and Commercial:	Closed	Closed	Closed	None expected

- Because of the poor projected Chinook run size, Salmon fishing closures will be necessary to protect Chinook Salmon as they migrate to their spawning grounds in Alaska and Canada. There likely will be no harvestable surplus of Chinook Salmon this year.
- There may be openings with selective gear types to target summer Chum Salmon if the run is projected to exceed the lower end of the drainage-wide escapement goal of 500,000 fish.
- The fall Chum Salmon run size may or may not be large enough to provide some subsistence fishing. The fall Chum Salmon projection will be revised in mid-July based on the 2023 summer Chum Salmon run size.
- Harvest restrictions for Coho Salmon will be determined by inseason run abundance.

PROPOSED FEDERAL TEMPORARY SPECIAL ACTIONS:

SUMMER SEASON:

- Starting on June 2 in District 1 and the Coastal District, subsistence Salmon fishing will close. Closures will move upriver based on Salmon travel time.
- Subsistence fishing for summer Chum Salmon will remain closed unless the run is projected to meet the drainagewide goal. Fishing for Chinook Salmon will likely remain closed all season. Closures to the retention of Chinook and summer Chum may be extended into the fall season.
- Fishing for non-salmon species with 4-inch or smaller mesh gill nets will be allowed during Salmon fishing closures; however, net length will be reduced to a maximum of 60 feet at the start of the season. Gillnets may be required to be operated as a set net, to better target non-salmon. Though incidentally caught Chinook and Chum Salmon may be retained in this gear, incidental harvests of these species in this gear has been very low drainage-wide. Because

there is not a conservation concern for non-salmon, and 4-inch gear does not directly target salmon, fishing for non-salmon species in Federal public waters will not be restricted to federally qualified subsistence users.

- Other non-salmon gear types, including hook and line, longline, jigging gear, hand line, beach seine, fyke net, spear, or lead may be used to fish for non-salmon species all year, even during Salmon fishing closures. Chinook and Chum Salmon should be avoided and must be released alive if incidentally caught.
- Pink and sockeye Salmon may be targeted by hook and line gear. Hook and line gear may be used for subsistence fishing for Salmon and non-salmon throughout the Yukon River drainage. Because there is not a conservation concern for pink and sockeye Salmon, fishing for these species in Federal public waters will not be restricted to federally qualified subsistence users.
- If the summer Chum Salmon run is projected to meet the drainagewide escapement goal, subsistence fishing opportunities with selective gear (dip nets, beach seines, and manned fish wheels) may be allowed. These opportunities would be limited to federally qualified subsistence users in Federal public waters.

FALL SEASON:

- Based on inseason forecast of fall Chum run, the season may begin with Salmon fishing for fall Chum Salmon closed. Subsistence fishing restrictions may be in place until October 1 in the Lower Yukon and this date will be transitioned upriver to fishing districts based on Salmon migration timing. Important fall Chum spawning tributaries may remain closed through December (Koyukuk, Teedriinjik, Porcupine, and District 6 tributaries of Tanana River).
- If a harvestable surplus becomes available, opportunities to subsistence fish for fall Chum Salmon with selective gear may be allowed (hook and line, dip nets, beach seines, and manned fish wheels). These opportunities would be limited to federally qualified subsistence users in Federal public waters.
- Opportunity to fish for fall Chum Salmon with gillnets may be allowed in Alaskan tributaries, depending on run strength and whether drainage wide escapement goals have been met. These opportunities would be limited to federally qualified subsistence users in Federal public waters.
- In the unlikely event that the fall Chum run is large enough to meet all escapement goals and to allow unrestricted subsistence fishing, and there were no longer restrictions in place for other Salmon species, then fishing would no longer be restricted to federally qualified subsistence users in Federal public waters.

IF SALMON FISHING IS OPEN, WHO CAN FISH IN FEDERAL WATERS?

- Nearly every rural resident in a community on the Yukon River is a federally qualified user for most Salmon openings because these communities have customary and traditional use determinations for Salmon (see the list below).

- If fishing is limited to federally qualified subsistence users, and harvest opportunity is provided by the Federal inseason manager, any of these rural residents can fish in Federal waters.
- People from Fairbanks and other parts of Alaska outside the Yukon, are not considered federally qualified users.
- Anyone formerly from a Yukon River village whose permanent residence is outside the Yukon is not a federally qualified subsistence user. These non-federally qualified users cannot participate in the “take” of Salmon on the Yukon, but can help in fish camp, help with processing, and can share in the harvest.

SOME ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

- “My son lives in Fairbanks. He comes back to the village every summer to help us fish. Will he be able to help us fish for Salmon?” – He cannot ‘take’ the Salmon, for example, run the boat, the gillnet, pick the net, in Federal waters; however, he can help with processing and preparing Salmon in fish camp and he can share in the harvest. This special action only applies to Federal waters so he could fish for Salmon in State waters. The proposed Federal closure only applies to Salmon fishing, so your son could help fish for non-Salmon fishes in either Federal or state waters.
- “My daughter lives in Bethel and likes to come back to her home village during the summer and fish for Salmon. She is considered a rural resident, so can she fish for Salmon on the Yukon?” – No, although she is a rural resident, she is not a resident of the Yukon and therefore could not ‘take’ Salmon in Federal waters of the Yukon, but she could help with processing and preparing salmon in fish camp (see example above).
- “Lots of people from Fairbanks fish for Salmon at the Yukon bridge. Will this special action prevent them from fishing for Salmon?” - No, this special action only applies to Federal waters. The waters around the bridge are State waters.

FEDERALLY QUALIFIED SUBSISTENCE USERS OF SALMON AND NON SALMON IN THE YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE:

All permanent rural residents of the Yukon River drainage and Coastal Communities (except residents of the Fairbanks North Star Borough, which is a Nonrural Area) including residents of the following rural communities:

Coastal communities: Stebbins, Scammon Bay, Hooper Bay and Chevak (the Federal Subsistence Board updated this list in winter of 2023 so that residents of these communities are federally qualified for all Salmon and non-Salmon species).

District 1: Alakanuk, Nunam Iqua, Emmonak, Kotlik

District 2: Village, Pitkas point, Saint Marys, Pilot Station, Marshall

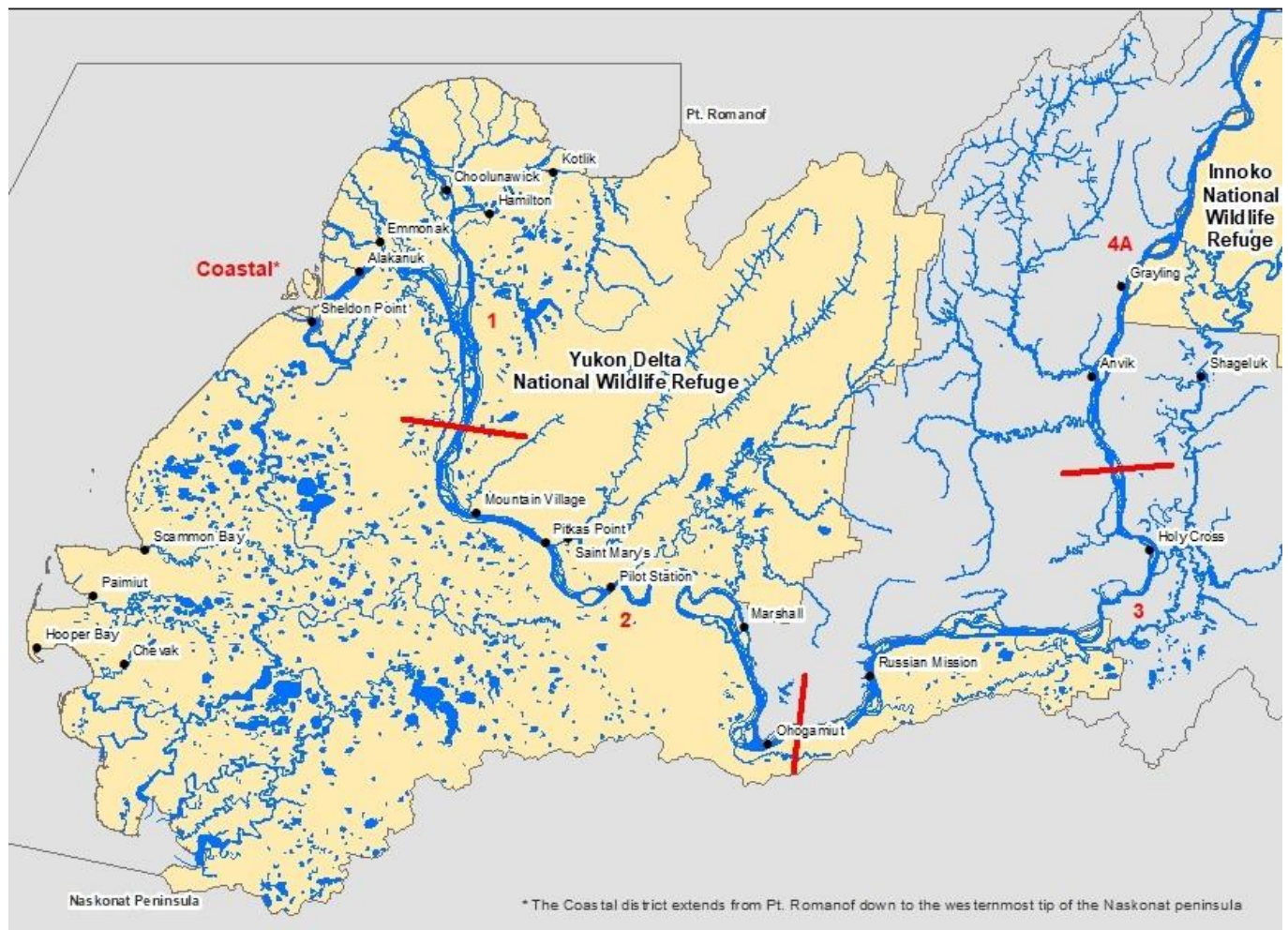
District 3: Russian Mission, Holy Cross, Shageluk

District 4: Anvik, Grayling, Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, Hughes, Allakaket, Alatna, Bettles, Evansville, Wiseman, Coldfoot, Galena, Ruby

District 5: Tanana, Rampart, Stevens Village, Beaver, Fort Yukon, Chalkyitsik, Arctic Village, Venetie, Birch Creek, Circle, Chicken, Central, Eagle Village, Eagle

District 6: Livengood, Manley Hot Springs, Minto, Whitestone, Nenana, Four Mile Road, Healy, McKinley/Denali Park, Anderson, Ferry, Lake MinChumina, Cantwell, Delta Junction, Fort Greely/Delta, Healy Lake, Big Delta, Dry Creek, Dot Lake, Dot Lake Village, Tanacross, Tetlin, Tok, Northway Junction/Village, Alcan Border, Nabesna

WHERE ARE FEDERAL WATERS ON THE YUKON?

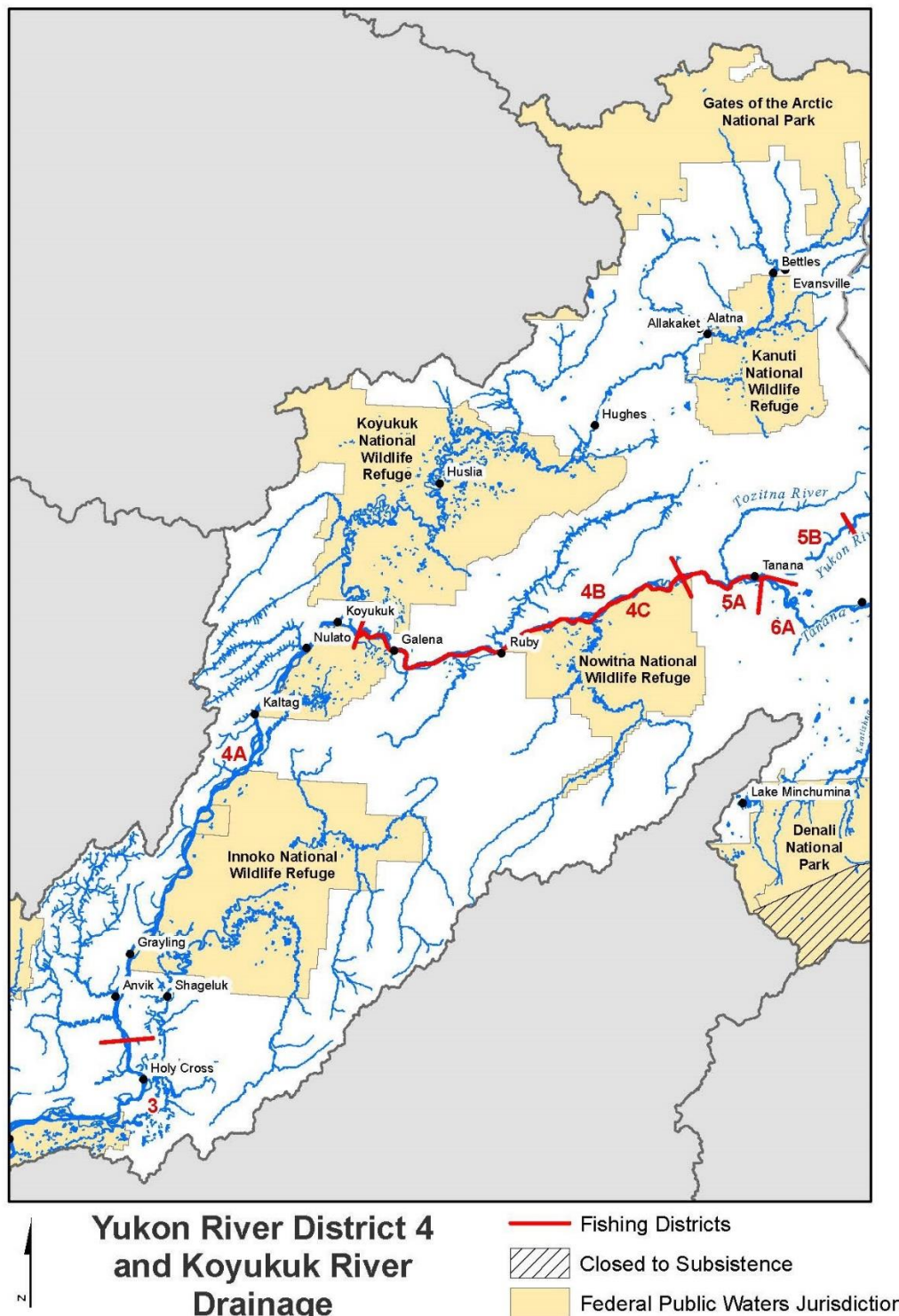


Yukon River Drainage Area -
Lower River Fishing Districts: Coastal, 1, 2, and 3

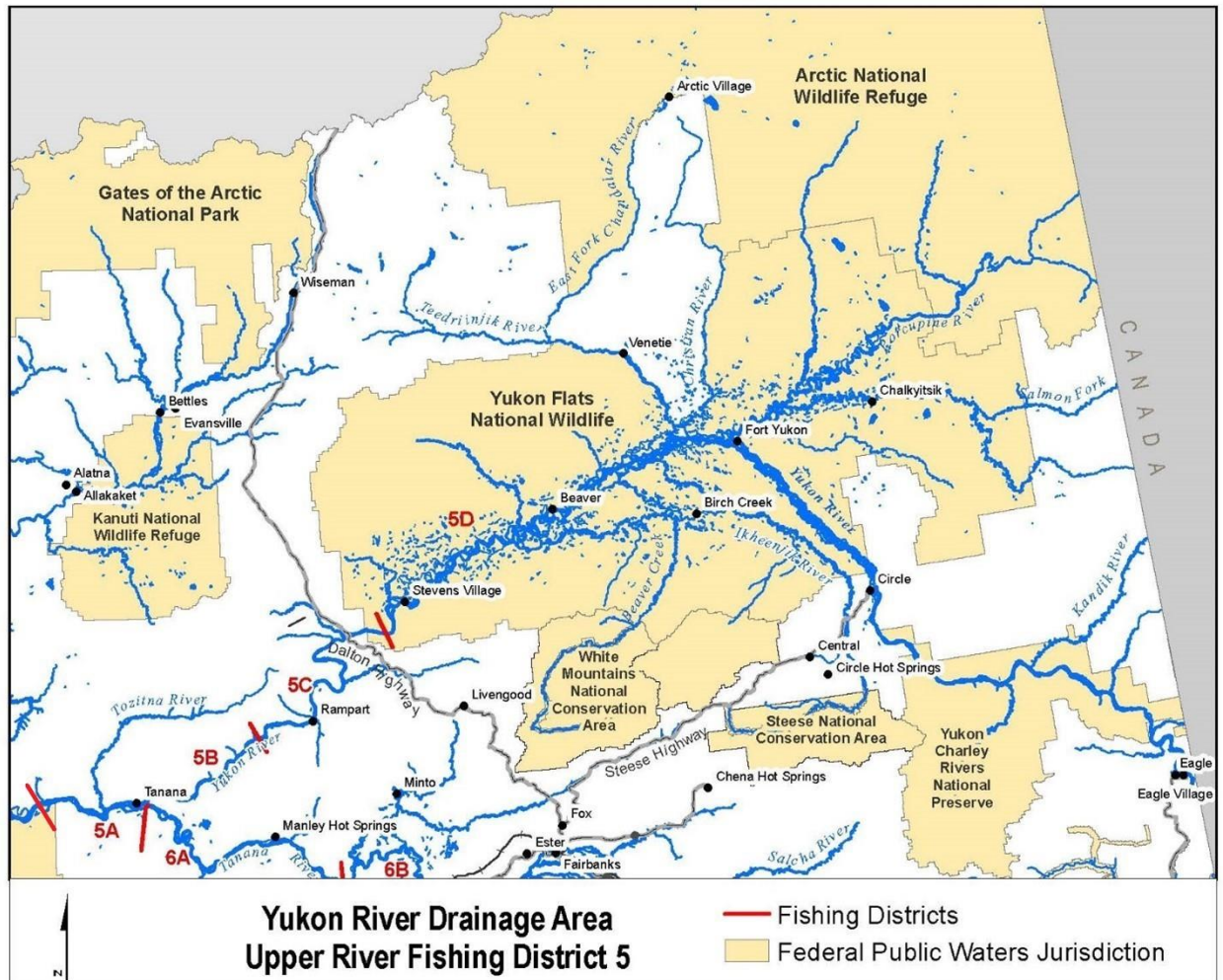
— Fishing Districts
 Federal Public Waters Jurisdiction

Hooper Bay, Chevak and Scammon Bay communities are in the Federal waters. However, if they fish along the coast in marine waters or bays, that is in State-managed waters.

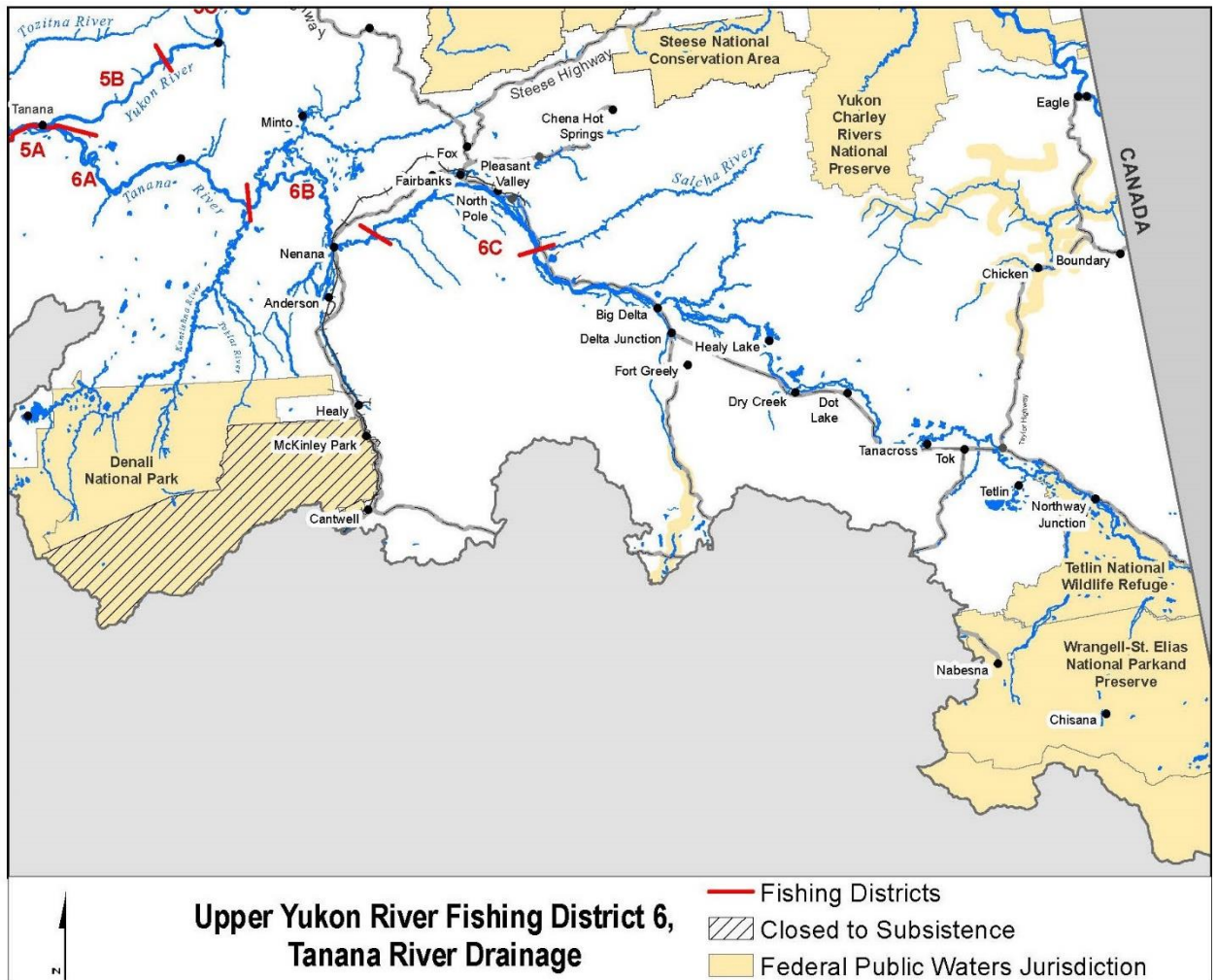
Communities and streams adjacent to the boundary of Federal lands are part of Federal waters, even on the opposite side of the river. Holy Cross, Shageluk and Anvik are in State waters.



Huslia falls within Federal waters and the following communities do not: Hughes, Alutna, Allakaket, Bettles, Evansville, Coldfoot and Wiseman.



In District 5 the communities of Tanana, Rampart, Circle and Eagle are part of State waters, the rest of the communities are in Federal Waters.



In District 6, the Tanana River, most communities are in State waters