



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management
National Park Service
Bureau of Indian Affairs

Federal Subsistence Board

1101 E Tudor Rd, MS 121
Anchorage Alaska 99503



Forest Service

Federal Waters Within the Boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

2015 Kuskokwim Area Chinook Salmon Fishing Outlook and Federal Management Fact Sheet 1

May 6, 2015

Kuskokwim River Chinook Forecast

- The State of Alaska Chinook salmon drainage-wide escapement goal is 65,000–120,000.
- Since 2010, the Kuskokwim River has experienced poor Chinook salmon returns with 2013 being the lowest return on record.

2014

- The 2014 State of Alaska Chinook salmon drainage-wide return was estimated at 136,000 fish, well below the annual average of 243,000 over the last 25 years.
- The subsistence harvest was estimated to be 12,000 Chinook salmon.
- The drainage-wide escapement was estimated at 124,000.

2015

- The 2015 Chinook salmon run is forecast to be between 96,000 and 163,000 fish.
- If the run returns at the lower end of the forecast range, even a very limited subsistence harvest could impact the likelihood of achieving escapement goals.
- Conservation measures are warranted in 2015, given that Chinook salmon returns have been low for several consecutive years and escapement goals were not met at two of three weir projects in 2014.
- The abundances of chum, sockeye, and coho salmon are expected to be large enough to meet escapement goals, amounts reasonably necessary for subsistence uses, and for non-subsistence uses.

Kuskokwim River Management

- State and federal fishery management staff will continue to follow guidelines outlined in the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan 5 AAC 07.365, to the extent possible, to meet escapement

goals, provide for subsistence use, and allow commercial fishing on available harvestable surpluses under State management.

- The Federal Subsistence Board delegated in-season authority to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Refuge Manager of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, and is the “federal in-season manager” on federal waters within the Refuge boundaries.
- The federal in-season manager is authorized, and will issue Special Actions, to limit the Chinook salmon harvest in order to meet escapement goals.
- The USFWS has a management objective targeting the upper end of the escapement goal range.
- ADF&G will manage the Kuskokwim river drainage above and below the Refuge during the federal closure. Additional State management guidelines will be defined by ADF&G for those areas.
- The federal in-season manager will continue to work with all user groups including tribes, ADF&G and their Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group, and the public to ensure that management objectives are being met.

2015 Kuskokwim River Restrictions and Guidelines

- Sport fishing for Chinook salmon remains closed in the entire Kuskokwim River drainage by State Emergency Closure. Subsistence fishing with all gear types remains open from now until May 21 between the mouth of the Kuskokwim River and Tuluksak, and until May 28 from Tuluksak to Aniak.
- On May 21, by Federal Special Action, the federal in-season manager will limit the Chinook salmon fishery within and adjacent to the boundary of the refuge (see Figures 1 and 2) to federally qualified subsistence users only.
- A second Federal Special Action on May 21 will close the Chinook salmon fishery to all user groups from the mouth of the Kuskokwim River to Tuluksak. An additional Federal Special Action on May 28 will extend the closure on Chinook salmon for all users groups up to the Refuge boundary at Aniak.
- The Refuge manager will issue additional Federal Special Actions to restrict gear types to provide for Chinook salmon conservation. In-season indicators of salmon run strength, including the Bethel Test Fishery and other assessment projects operated by an assortment of partnerships between state, federal, and tribal organizations, will guide the timing of these actions. Chinook salmon caught with legal gear types may be retained
- The federal closure for Chinook salmon conservation will end no later than 60 days after the first Federal Special Action takes effect.

Expected Restrictions on the Kuskokwim River within the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Federal Special Action)

Expected Special Action 1

Chinook Salmon Fishing is Limited to Only Federally Qualified Users

Effective 6:00 a.m., Thursday, May 21, 2015- Federal public waters in that portion of the Kuskokwim River drainage that are within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge are closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon except by the residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Chefornak, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok and Kongiganak.

Expected Special Action 2

Kuskokwim River Mouth to Tuluksak (Federal Special Action)

Effective 6:00 a.m., Thursday, May 21, 2015- Chinook salmon fishing is closed to all user groups. Gill nets must be set and are restricted to four-inch or less mesh size not exceeding 60-feet in length and 45 meshes deep; this opportunity is allowed for 72 hours each week from 6:00 a.m. Thursday through 6:00a.m. Sunday. This area is closed to all gill nets from 6:01 a.m. Sunday through 5:59 a.m. Thursday weekly.

This four-inch opportunity is allowed on the following dates and times:

6 a.m. Thursday May 21 until 6 a.m. Sunday May 24

6 a.m. Thursday May 28 until 6 a.m. Sunday May 31

6 a.m. Thursday June 4 until 6 a.m. Sunday June 7

6 a.m. Thursday June 11 until 6 a.m. Sunday June 14

6 a.m. Thursday June 18 until 6 a.m. Sunday June 21

This area is defined as the portion of the Kuskokwim River and its salmon tributaries upstream from the southern refuge boundary (Figure 1) at the Kuskokwim River mouth to a line between ADF&G regulatory markers located approximately half a mile upstream of the Tuluksak River mouth. This section includes the slough (locally known as Utak Slough) on the northwest side of the Kuskokwim River adjacent to the Tuluksak River mouth. Excluded waters are non-salmon spawning tributaries: those portions of the Kinak, Kialik, Tagayarak, Johnson, and Gweek rivers more than 100 yards upstream from the mouth of these rivers, are open with any mesh size gill net and are not affected by these closures. Chinook salmon harvested incidentally in gill nets may be kept for subsistence uses; Chinook salmon caught incidentally with all other legal gear types (see below) must be immediately released.

Expected Special Action 3

Tuluksak to the Eastern Refuge Boundary (Federal Special Action)

Effective 6:00 a.m., Thursday, May 28, 2015- Chinook salmon fishing is closed to all user groups. Gill nets must be set and are restricted to four-inch or less mesh size not exceeding 60-feet in length and 45

meshes deep; this opportunity is allowed for 72 hours each week from 6:00 a.m. Thursday through 6:00 a.m. Sunday. This area is closed to all gill nets from 6:01 a.m. Sunday through 5:59 a.m. Thursday weekly.

This four-inch opportunity is allowed on the following dates and times:

6 a.m. Thursday May 28 until 6 a.m. Sunday May 31

6 a.m. Thursday June 4 until 6 a.m. Sunday June 7

6 a.m. Thursday June 11 until 6 a.m. Sunday June 14

6 a.m. Thursday June 18 until 6 a.m. Sunday June 21

This area is defined as that portion of the Kuskokwim River and its tributaries upstream from a line between ADF&G regulatory markers located approximately half a mile upstream of the Tuluksak River mouth to the northern Refuge boundary (Figure 2). This section does NOT include the slough (locally known as Utak Slough) on the northwest side of the Kuskokwim River adjacent to the Tuluksak River mouth. Excluded waters are non-salmon spawning tributaries: the Whitefish Lake drainage near Aniak and those portions of Discovery, Birch, and Swift creeks more than 100 yards upstream from the mouth of these rivers are open with any mesh size gill net and are not affected by these closures. Chinook salmon harvested incidentally in gill nets may be kept for subsistence uses; Chinook salmon caught incidentally with all other legal gear types (see below) must be immediately released.

Expected Special Action 4

Salmon Tributary Closures

Effective 6 a.m. Sunday June 7, 2015, All gillnets will be prohibited on the Kwethluk, Kisaralik, Kasigluk, and Tuluksak tributaries to provide Chinook salmon escapement.

These tributaries have experienced poor Chinook salmon escapements since 2008 and the restrictions are warranted to provide adequate escapement for the 2015 season. The Chinook salmon escapement in the Kwethluk River has not exceeded the lower bound of the escapement goal in six of the last seven years and escapement in the Kisaralik and Tuluksak Rivers has been far below average during these same years.

Tributary Information

- There will be no restrictions on any tributaries on the west side of the Kuskokwim River within the Refuge. Fishing is allowed with all gear types more than 100 yards upstream from the mouths of these tributaries.
- All gill nets will be prohibited from June 7 to the end of the federal closure on the Kwethluk, Kisaralik, Kasigluk and Tuluksak tributaries to provide for Chinook salmon escapement.

Other Legal Methods

- The Federal Special Action limiting fishing to federally qualified subsistence users is intended for Chinook salmon conservation and to limit gear types that aim to harvest Chinook salmon or have a high likelihood of harvesting Chinook salmon.
- Qualified Alaska residents may utilize other gear types except gill nets for other fish species. Legal gear types for other species include dip-net, beach seine, fish wheel, or rod and reel subject to permanent regulation. While using other gear types, all Chinook salmon caught must be immediately returned to the water unharmed.
- Sport fishing for Chinook salmon remains closed in the entire Kuskokwim River drainage by state Emergency Order.
- Non-residents can fish for other species in accordance with State sport fishing regulations.

Six-Inch Gill Net Mesh Restrictions

- Fishing will be allowed with gill nets restricted to six-inch or less mesh size when sufficient protection for Chinook salmon can be assured at some point in June.
- Subsistence fishing periods will be based on Chinook, chum, and sockeye salmon abundance. Subsistence fishing periods will likely be limited in time to reduce incidental harvest of Chinook salmon. These periods will be defined in-season but will likely be initiated during the latter half of June. The duration and frequency of fishing periods will be increased or decreased based on in-season run assessment. Additionally, gill nets may be restricted to 25 fathoms (150 feet) in length during these periods to reduce incidental harvest of Chinook salmon.

Gear Identification

- Kegs or buoys of any color but red may be used on any permitted gear.
- The user's first initial, last name, and address must be plainly and legibly inscribed on each keg, buoy, gill net stake, on stake for ice fishing gear and any other unattended fishing gear used to take fish for subsistence uses.

In-season Assessment and Research

- In-season indicators of salmon run strength include the Bethel Test Fishery and other assessment projects operated by an assortment of partnerships between state, federal, and tribal organizations.
- Further announcements will be made from the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge office and through local radio stations. News releases will be faxed to area villages.

Bethel Test Fishery Fish Distribution

- USFWS will continue to work with ADF&G and Orutsararmiut Native Council to distribute fish from the Bethel Test Fishery to villages in the Kuskokwim River Drainage.

**For additional information concerning this fact sheet contact:
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge at 907-543-1023 or 907-545-3151**



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

Figure 2015-1

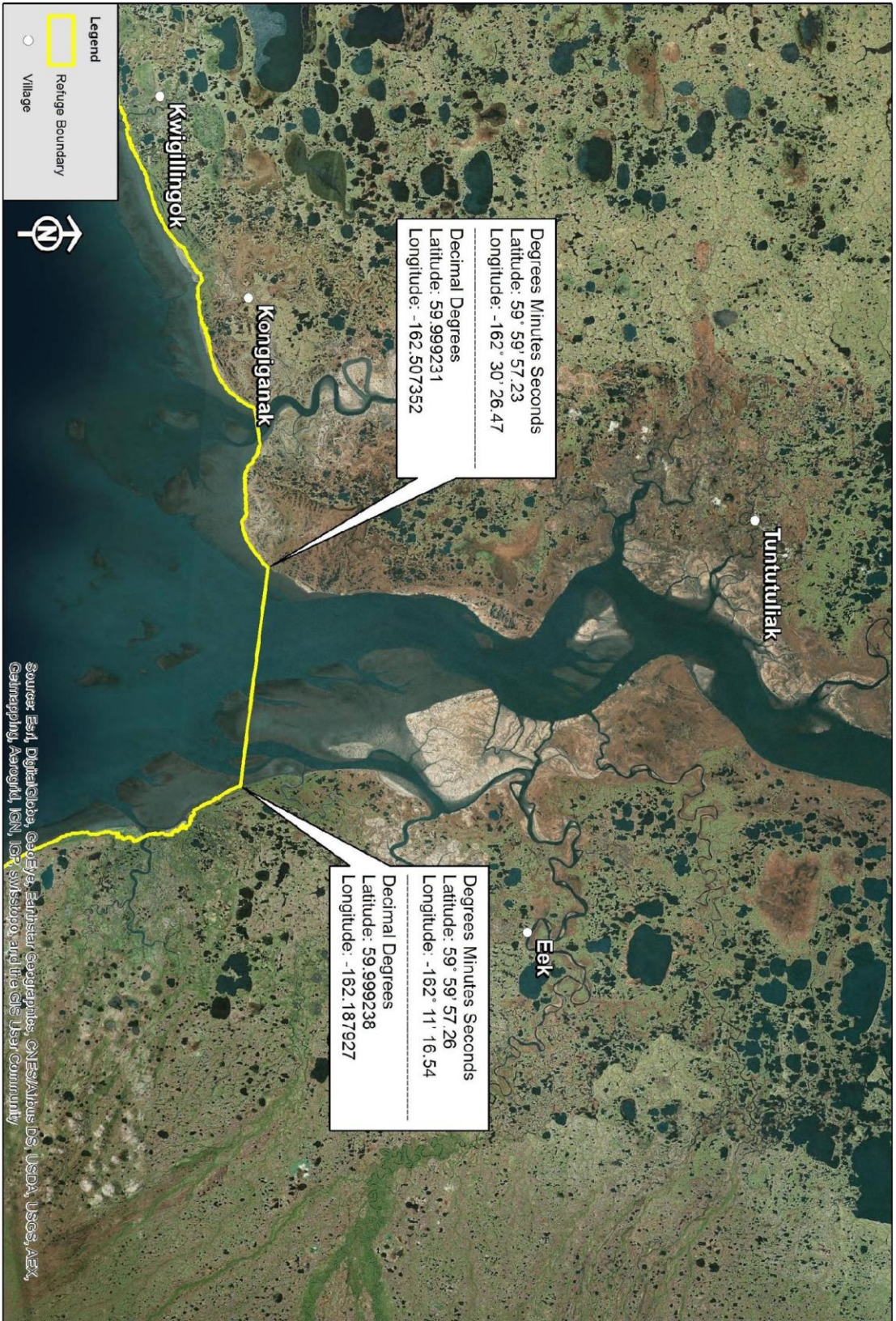


Figure 1

Figure 2

