



**YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION**

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***Report to the Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council  
October 2022***

**FRMP PROJECTS**

**In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences:**

The In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences began on June 7, 2022. In preparation for the teleconferences, posters were sent to all the communities along the Yukon River including Canadian First Nations. A meeting was held with the fishery managers to discuss any concerns or issues associated with the upcoming season. It was agreed that we provided assessment project updates first before we went into community reports. Throughout the season we provided other special reports, such as, Area M updates from ADF&G, Bycatch Report from NPFMC, water monitoring report from Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council, and climate change research project from NOAA. If questions were not answered or available during the call; YRDFA staff would follow up with the participant. Many of the presentations were determined by the comments and concerns of the participants. This year the interest in participating in the teleconference was low. With the 3rd year of no harvest of salmon we tried our best to engage the communities. We will continue to look for ways our teleconference calls can be more productive for both user and manager.

Date	# of Callers	Length of Call	Highlights
6/7/22	62	114	-high water -dry conditions -Food security
6/14/22	43	103	-High water -Food security -Area M management
6/21/22	73	124	-extremely dry conditions -Bycatch donations -Actions taken on Area M issue

6/28/22	85	160	-Donations -water dropping -Frustrated by lack of salmon
7/5/22	68	130	-Water Quality Monitoring -Ichthyophonus study -Culturally Displaced
7/12/22	75	165	-Social/Mental struggles -Sheefish runs -Bycatch Report
7/19/22	71	152	-Social/Mental Struggles -Food Banks -high cost of living/gas prices
7/26/22	59	119	-Water level still high -Cultural Displaced -Afraid restriction on non-salmon
8/2/22	54	83	-Single digit numbers of Chinook in Canada -Area M -Food security
8/9/22	52	123	-Ichthyophonus study -Area M study -Social/Mental struggles
8/16/22	44	81	-water levels high -Cultural displaced -Need more advocacy
8/23/22	48	83	-Climate Change Presentation -Test fishery ending -Water temperature
8/30/22	56	103	-Board of Fisheries meetings -Mtg w/Governor -Hatcheries

**In-Season Salmon Survey:**

The In-season Subsistence Salmon Survey Program is an important communication tool that helps managers ensure that both Yukon River escapement is met and, in a normal year, as many subsistence fishers are meeting their goals as possible. YRDFA hires a local person in 10 communities along the Yukon River stretching from Alakanuk to Eagle to survey fishers during the Chinook salmon season in their community. The observations fishers share with YRDFA surveyors are summarized by the community to protect anonymity and then shared with Yukon

River In-season Managers and the Yukon River community through the In-season Salmon Management Teleconferences. This project is funded by the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program through March of 2024.

YRDFA surveyors conducted Final Interviews for the 2022 season with fishers in their community. The results are summarized in a separate handout for this meeting. YRDFA surveyors also completed an evaluation survey summarizing their experience with the program this year. In general, the surveyors felt that they were well trained and supported for their position. They were challenged by the fishing conditions this year which led to fishers being more reluctant to participate in the survey. We are looking at ways to improve this program including possibly upgrading the program to an electronic version or an app.

#### **OTHER PROJECTS:**

**Yukon River Watershed Clearinghouse: A culturally responsive monitoring program.** This new project, funded by the State of Alaska, has YRDFA partnering with the Yukon River Intertribal Watershed Council to establish a clearinghouse that allows tracking of both social and ecological changes in ways that are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of stakeholders in the Yukon River watershed. This 5-year project began in July 2022. The clearinghouse aims to: 1) to assess existing Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) records of observed freshwater system, climate, fish health and abundance changes in the YRW; 2) to identify TEK gaps and conduct additional semi-structured interviews with Elders to generate a historical timeline of observed changes; 3) to develop and apply TEK indicators to assess freshwater and ecosystem health conditions; 4) to establish a comprehensive YRW database that incorporates all available historical and current climate, water quality and quantity data to identify spatial and temporal trends; 5) to develop and incorporate TEK indicators with western science data in order to understand patterns and trends to provide a holistic and long-term understanding of aquatic systems, fish abundance and health changes; and 6) to ultimately identify impacts to vulnerable water bodies and fish habitat areas in order to prioritize these hotspots for increased data collection and to improve the design of coordinated, long-term monitoring efforts in the YRW.

***They Told Us There'd Come a Time, Conserving Fish, Preserving Tradition on the Yukon River, A catalog of Elders Warnings:*** This project, funded by the North Pacific Research Board, has YRDFA partnering with the Tanana Chiefs Conference young adult Emerging Leaders to research documented Local and Traditional Knowledge of salmon and search for advice or warnings from the Elders. We are approaching the end of year two of our three-year project and planning our third training event. The goal of this training will be to prepare to create final products which will include short videos, presentations, summary brochures, and reports. In year two, we held a training event to learn to do qualitative interviews with today's Elders and record them in a high quality way that can be submitted to the University of Alaska Fairbanks archives. Our team has spent the last two years digging through the archives, learning about Elders from their

communities, and conducting interviews with their Elders. We look forward to their exploration into how to share all we have learned.

### **Integrating Local and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (LTK) into Anadromous Waters Cataloging and Fish Inventories of select drainages of the Tanana and Yukon rivers 2021-2023:**

This project, funded by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund (AKSSF), is a partnership between YRDLFA and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Together, we are working with the communities of Tanana, Nenana, and Manley Hot Springs to identify important areas with anadromous fish and other fish for investigations to nominate areas for the anadromous waters catalog and the fish inventory. In the first year of the project, we traveled to all three study communities and held LTK interviews and mapping activities with knowledgeable fishers and hunters. We were able to conduct a total of 20 interviews; five in Manley Hot Springs, five in Tanana, and ten in Nenana. These knowledgeable subsistence providers shared important information about fish locations. This summer, the team from the ADFG attempted to document fish presence, rearing, and spawning through river boat and helicopter surveys. They floated the Tanana River from Nenana to Tanana in early June and traveled to Tanana to conduct field surveys by boat and helicopter in July. They had planned to also travel to Nenana and Manley Hot Springs for the July work but fires in the area required them to abbreviate their work. We hope to get back to the field in September and to the communities to share about the project this fall.

### **IMPORTANT ISSUES**

**Meeting with Governor:** On August 29, thirty residents from the Bristol Bay, Norton Sound, Yukon and Kuskokwim (BBAYK) regions of Alaska met with Governor Dunleavy and the Commissioner of Fish and Game to appeal to them to use their power to stop the interception of fish bound for the spawning grounds in the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) region. Fists pounded the table as the frustration over the intercept of Chinook and chum salmon continues to happen in the Area M fishery. Those fishermen rake in an average of \$647,000 per vessel while subsistence users in the AYK stand on the banks. Stricter management of Area M is long overdue. Robin Samuelson, of Dillingham, Alaska, told the Governor and Commissioner of Fish and Game that they have the power to limit interception of Yukon and Kuskokwim bound chum and Chinook salmon in Area M June fisheries. *“Our constitution clearly states that fisheries must be managed for sustained yield and it’s not happening in the Yukon and Kuskokwim regions.”* Samuelson said.

Concerns about the near-complete loss of subsistence salmon fishing in the AYK brought together 15 organizations asking Governor Dunleavy for this meeting. The survival of the people in the AYK is at stake as we witness the dramatic declines of some or all species of salmon in Norton Sound, and on the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. The Yukon River communities are bearing the brunt of this loss, too, as they are seeing historic lows of Chinook salmon entering the river while the chum salmon have not reached the 300,000 mark to allow for subsistence harvest. A mere 44,581 Chinook salmon were counted at the Pilot Station sonar with 12,025 passing the Eagle sonar, heading to the spawning grounds in Canada.

*“The State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game cannot stand by while the Yukon River salmon fishery is failing and continue to allow an intercept fishery to resume as normal.”* stated Serena Fitka, executive director of the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association. Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang recommended going to the Board of Fisheries and asking them to make the necessary changes to the regulations. There is a conservation and food security issue at stake here. The Commissioner must do more than redirect the people of the AYK. We’ve asked him to support an upcoming proposal to the Board of Fisheries that would limit Area M fishers to conserve and protect chum and Chinook salmon bound for the AYK based on a conservation concern. BBAYK residents asked for a second meeting with the Governor in two months to further discuss solutions and to take action.

#### **UPCOMING PROJECTS:**

##### **Engaging Fishers in Chinook and Chum Salmon Decline**

This project, funded by the North Pacific Research Board, will begin in January of 2023 and has a goal of contributing to an understanding of the drivers of decline and collapse in Yukon Chinook and chum salmon. Local and Traditional Knowledge interviews on historical Chinook salmon health in Alakanuk and Emmonak will inform biological research on drivers of salmon decline. Additionally, Yukon River fishers in St. Mary’s and Huslia will be recruited and trained to document carcass/egg studies, temperature monitoring, and develop a rapid community response Standard Operating Plan to document heat events and impacts on Yukon River salmon. This project will go through February 2026.

##### **Meetings:**

The YRDFA annual meeting was held in Anchorage, March 22-23, 2022. Due to lack of funding the meeting was a hybrid. A quorum was established to take action on items.

Meeting highlights:

- Catherine Moncrieff was given an award for her 20 years of service to YRDFA.

##### **Upcoming meetings:**

Salmon in Crisis AFN Reception hosted by YRDFA

October 19, 2022 from 5:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

BP Energy Center

Light food and drinks provided

*Yukon River Salmon Management Pre-Season Planning meeting*

TENTATIVE: APRIL 19-20, 2023 in Fairbanks, AK

Location: TBD

*YRDFA Annual Board meeting*

TENTATIVE: April 18, 2023 in Fairbanks, AK

Location: TBD



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## YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

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### **In-season Subsistence Salmon Survey - Final Interviews with fishers**

To wrap up the fishing season and to better understand how it went for fishers in the survey communities, the In-season Salmon Surveyors ask a series of questions aimed at summarizing the season. This year was another difficult year for fishing as well as for surveying. Although we were able to hire and train a surveyor for each community, most found it very difficult to survey frustrated fishers who were not fishing. Eight surveyors were able to conduct the Final Interview Questions with a small group of fishers in their communities.

#### **The Final Interview Questions included:**

- How did Covid-19 impact your fishing season?
- Despite salmon fishing closures, were you able to get a few salmon in 4-inch gear or selective gear?
- Considering salmon conditions this year, were you able to get more of other species? If not, what were the barriers for you?
- Fishing closures are devastating to traditional practices and meeting food needs. When runs are very poor, do you think closures are necessary to protect future salmon runs?
- Overall, were you able to harvest enough fish, salmon or non-salmon, for your family for the winter?
- What was your main source of information?

#### **Overall Summary:**

- The impact of Covid-19 was greatly reduced this year with most participants stating that Covid-19 did NOT impact their fishing season. But some participants in almost every community felt some impact or stayed isolated from others.
- Despite the salmon closures, some participants in the communities of Alakanuk, Marshall, and Tanana were able to get a few salmon with their 4" nets or selective gear. Anvik had mixed results but most participants in Anvik did not get any salmon. In Mountain Village, Ruby, Huslia, and Fort Yukon, participants did not get any salmon.
- Participants in Alakanuk, Marshall, and Huslia caught some nonsalmon species. In Tanana and Fort Yukon nonsalmon harvest success was mixed with less than half reporting harvesting nonsalmon. In Mountain Village, Anvik, and Ruby, participants reported no nonsalmon harvest.
- When asked if closures are necessary when salmon runs are very poor to protect future runs, all or the majority of participants in Alakanuk and Tanana said yes; in Mountain Village, Anvik, Ruby, and Huslia, participants were evenly split; and in Fort Yukon, all four participants said no. There were many comments from the split answers such as "we need at least one opening" or "limit household harvest".
- Almost all of the participants in all of the communities stated that they did not harvest enough fish for the winter.

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- These fishers get their fishing information from the radio, YRDFA teleconferences, ADF&G News Releases, Facebook/social media, word of mouth, friends, and their Tribe.

### **By Community:**

Alakanuk- Eleven final interviews were completed in Alakanuk. Covid-19 affected two participant's fishing seasons and nine were unaffected by Covid-19 this year. Despite the challenges this year, nine participants were able to get a few salmon while two did not get any salmon. They also caught a few whitefish, pink salmon, and sheefish. Barriers to fishing for Alakanuk fishers included travel, debris in river, and high water. When salmon runs are poor, eight fishers in Alakanuk think that closures are necessary while two do not. Comments included: "Not on the Yukon, trawlers need to stop," "Don't really know why they close," "[at at] certain point, need to subsist for salmon," "yes, so that our grandkids will have fish." Overall, five fishers were able to harvest (or receive) enough other fish for the winter but six were not able to harvest enough for the winter. One fisher received fish from the Kuskokwim River and one caught whitefish to supplement their harvest. Finally, fishers in Alakanuk get their fishing information from the Radio KNOM, ADFG news releases, YRDFA, and Facebook.

Mountain Village – Three final interviews were completed in Mountain Village. Covid-19 affected two out of the three participants' fishing seasons. With the challenges to fishing this year, all participants reported that they were NOT able to get any salmon with the 4" or selective gear this year. They also reported that they were NOT able to get any other species of fish due to salmon closures and health issues. Two participants agreed that closures are necessary when salmon runs are poor but one stated that "at least one opening was needed". None of the participants were able to harvest enough fish for the winter. Participants in Mountain Village get their fishing information from the YRDFA teleconferences and the ADFG News Releases.

Marshall – Two final interviews were completed in Marshall. Covid -19 affected one participant but not the other. Both participants were able to get a few salmon this year, despite the challenging conditions. They were also able to get some non-salmon including whitefish, sheefish as well as a few chum and sockeye. Both fishers thought that closures were necessary for the Area M fishery. One fisher was able to get some fish for the winter and planned to fish in the fall. The other fisher did not get enough fish for winter. They keep informed through 'word of mouth', ADFG News Releases and the YRDFA surveyor.

Anvik – Six final interviews were conducted in Anvik. As for Covid-19 impacts to the fishing season, two people said it did not affect their fishing because there was no fishing. Three said there was no impact by Covid-19, one gave "no comment" and one person said they were "greatly affected" by Covid-19 this year. Two participants reported they were able to get a few salmon this year but five were unable to harvest salmon. One person complained about the gas at \$8/gallon. As for harvesting non-salmon, all six said they were unable to harvest. Reasons for a lack of non-salmon harvest included: price of fuel, no boat motor, and never fished. Fishers in Anvik were split on whether the closures are necessary in times of poor runs, four said yes and three said that households should be allowed a limited harvest. All participants in Anvik reported that they did NOT get enough fish for the winter. One participant received some fish as a gift. A seventh participant did not want to answer questions but said they did not fish this year and they were very upset. Fishers get their information in Anvik through the radio, friends, Facebook, YRDFA and the ADFG news releases.

Ruby – Seven final interviews were conducted in Ruby. Covid-19 did not impact their fishing seasons. Fishers did not have 4" nets or other selective gear to fish this year. They were not able to get non-salmon due to high water, a lack of gear, lack of a fishing spot, and a lack of open fishing periods. Three

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participants said yes and no to necessary closures during poor salmon runs (expressing their understanding of the need for the fishery and the need for their households), three said closures are necessary and one was undecided. None of the participating fishers in Ruby were able to harvest enough fish for this winter. They get their fishing information from Facebook, their Tribe, and the Radio.

Huslia – Four final interviews were conducted in Huslia this year. Covid-19 did not impact them except for one person who reported they could not travel to Nulato to fish. All four reported that they were NOT able to get a few salmon in selective gear or 4” nets. Three reported getting sheefish and other nonsalmon species. When asked if closures are necessary when runs are very poor to protect future runs, two participants said yes, one said no, and one said, “I think it’s important to save fish but also important we get fish”. No one got enough fish for the winter, but one fisher was still trying, and another said, “not really”. In Huslia, they get their fishing information from Facebook, the YRDFA teleconferences, family, radio and other social media.

Tanana – Ten final interviews were completed in Tanana/Rapids area. Covid-19 had no impact on the fishing season of five participants and some impact on five participants. Some reported that they caught Covid-19 but were not sick for long or badly and one stated that they stayed away from people to avoid Covid-19. Despite the salmon fishing closures, six participants reported that they were able to get some salmon. They reported they “got 1 salmon from the ICH project in the Rapids”, “caught small salmon”, “just a few”, or “pulled their nets during the pulse”. Four participants reported that they “never fished” or had “no 4” net”. Considering the salmon conditions this year, only four fishers reported getting more nonsalmon species and commented that they “got enough to feed their dogs” and multiple people commented that “whitefish seemed less this year”. One fisher reported that they, “got more Bering cisco than Humpback [whitefish]”. All ten participants in the Tanana/Rapids area felt that closures are necessary when salmon runs are very poor. They also commented that the 4” net was necessary, or all the fish camps would close. Some comments included, “need a way to feed dogs”, “the closures should have started long ago”, “have to allow some fishing”, and “no commercial ever again”. None of the participants reported harvesting enough fish for the winter this year. Some said, “nothing at all”, some said “no winter food” or “just fed dogs and a few for people”, and some called it the “worst year ever”. Fishers in Tanana/Rapids get their fishing information from YRDFA, the radio, the Rapids Research Center, word of mouth and through the ADFG updates.

Fort Yukon- Four final interviews were conducted in Fort Yukon. Covid-19 did not affect three of the participants but probably caused some isolation. One participant said, “I stayed away”, another said, “I couldn’t fish with families”. All four reported that they were NOT able to get a few salmon with 4” or selective gear this year. For nonsalmon, two participants harvested sheefish, pike and whitefish while two did not. All four agreed that they did NOT think fishing closures were necessary during poor salmon runs. And all four did NOT harvest enough fish for the winter. In Fort Yukon, participants get their information from the radio, Facebook, and the YRDFA teleconferences.