



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

SUBSISTENCE FISHING

SPECIAL ACTION

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

Special Action No.: 3-KS-02-17 Issued at: Bethel, Alaska
May 24, 2017

Effective Date: June 12, 2017 12:01 a.m.

Expiration Date: August 10, 2017 11:59 p.m., unless superseded by subsequent Special Action

EXPLANATION:

Waters under Federal subsistence fisheries jurisdiction of the Kuskokwim River main stem and salmon tributaries including the Eek, Kwethluk, Kasigluk, Kisaralik, Tuluksak, and Aniak rivers will be closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon by all Federally qualified subsistence users. Fishing openings and closings for Federally qualified subsistence users identified under an ANILCA Section 804 analysis, which includes residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Cheformak, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok, and Kongiganek will be announced by subsequent special action, after consultation and coordination with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Fishing for species other than Chinook salmon remains legal under permanent and emergency regulation by the ADFG and the Federal Subsistence Management Program.

REGULATION

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

Unless re-opened by the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager, Federal public waters in that portion of the Kuskokwim River drainage and its salmon tributaries, within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, are closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon by Federally qualified subsistence users. Salmon tributaries are the Eek, Kwethluk, Kasigluk, Kisaralik, Tuluksak and Aniak and their tributaries. Based on observed run strength and in consideration of conservation concerns and escapement goals, the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager may open Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River to the harvest of Chinook salmon by Federally qualified subsistence

users identified under a ANILCA Section 804 analysis, which includes residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Chefornak, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok, and Kongiganek.

JUSTIFICATION


The closure to the harvest of Chinook salmon to Federally qualified subsistence users on the Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River was issued to assure the continued viability of populations of Chinook salmon, including the allowance of adequate escapement to portions of the drainage upstream of Federal public waters. The Federal in-season manager will assess the run of Chinook salmon and provide harvest opportunity with subsequent special actions. The decision to reopen Federal public waters to Federally qualified subsistence users identified under a ANILCA Section 804 analysis, which includes residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Chefornak, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok, and Kongiganek, will be made in consultation with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. This action is necessary to assure the continued viability of Chinook salmon.

Since 2010, the Kuskokwim River has experienced poor runs of Chinook salmon, and 2013 was the lowest run on record. In 2015, the total run was estimated at 172,000 Chinook salmon with an estimated subsistence harvest of 16,000 Chinook salmon. The 2016 total run was estimated at 177,000 Chinook salmon with an estimated subsistence harvest of 30,600. If the 2017 return is within the forecast of 132,000 to 222,000, there will be enough fish to meet escapement goals and provide for limited Chinook salmon subsistence harvest. However, a subsistence harvest at the level of the long-term average of 87,000 Chinook salmon would not be sustained at the lower end of the projected run. Thus, some harvest restrictions are warranted during 2017 to meet biological requirements while providing limited subsistence harvest opportunity once the run has been assessed and the early portion of the run has been allowed to reach the middle and upper sections of the drainage.

The closure of salmon-bearing tributaries is due to the low Chinook salmon returns to Kuskokwim River tributaries over the last several years. While escapement goals were met or exceeded for the majority of weir projects in 2016, conservation measures are warranted in the 2017 season to aid in the recovery of these stocks. Chinook salmon returns in the Kwethluk River have fallen below the lower bound of the escapement goal in six of the last eight years, and escapement in the Aniak, Kisaralik and Tuluksak rivers has been far below average. The Eek River is closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon as a salmon spawning stream to conserve salmon going upstream to spawn. Even a very limited subsistence harvest could impact the likelihood of achieving sufficient escapement; therefore, the tributary-specific restrictions are necessary for the conservation of healthy populations of Chinook salmon.

FEDERAL SUBSISTENCE BOARD

By delegation to:


 Ken Stahlnecker, Refuge Manager
 Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

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Executive Director, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Chairman, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
Eugene R. Peltola, Jr., Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management,
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