



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-08-15 Issued at: Bethel, Alaska
June 17, 2015

Effective Date: June 18, 2015 6:00 a.m.

Expiration Date: July 20, 2015 5:59 a.m. Unless superseded by subsequent Special Action

EXPLANATION:

Set gillnet opportunity from Tuluksak River to Aniak

This action opens an opportunity for Federally qualified residents to harvest non-salmon species using four-inch set gillnets on the Kuskokwim River within the boundaries of Yukon Delta National Wildlife River upriver of Tuluksak River. This action follows the conservation strategy discussed with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Kuskokwim River Inter-tribal Fish Commission on June 16, 2015. All fishing by non-Federally qualified users remains closed on the Kuskokwim River and its salmon tributaries within the Refuge boundaries. Chinook salmon fishing remains closed to all user groups on the Kuskokwim River and its salmon tributaries within the Refuge boundaries excluding to those fishing with the Community Harvest Permits.

REGULATION

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

This special action supersedes Special Action 3-KS-05-15

Effective 6:00 a.m., Thursday, June 18, 2015, All fishing is closed to non-Federally qualified users and Chinook Salmon fishing is closed to all user groups. Federally qualified users may use set gillnets that are restricted to four-inch or less mesh, not exceeding 60-feet in length and 45 meshes in depth; this gillnet opportunity is only allowed for 72 hours from 6:00 a.m. Thursday June 18, 2015 through 6:00 a.m. Sunday June 21, 2015, after which, no gillnets will be allowed until a subsequent special action opens this section of the river. This area is defined as that

portion of the Kuskokwim River upstream of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game regulatory markers immediately upriver of Tuluksak to the Refuge boundary immediately upriver of Aniak. All fish incidentally caught in these gillnet openings may be retained. There are no gillnet restrictions 100-yards upriver of non-salmon tributaries. In the Kuskokwim River and its salmon tributaries, you may subsistence fish for non-salmon species using all other gear types aside from gillnets as allowed in permanent regulations. Chinook Salmon incidentally harvested with all other legal gear types must be immediately released. This closure does not affect the Chinook Salmon harvest opportunity with Federal Community Harvest Permits.

JUSTIFICATION

Biological

Due to the low Chinook Salmon returns over the last several years and the failure to meet escapement goals at two of three weir projects in 2014, conservation measures are warranted in 2015. The 2014 State of Alaska Chinook Salmon drainage-wide return was estimated at 136,000 fish, well below the annual average of 243,000 fish over the last 25 years. The subsistence harvest in 2014 was estimated to be 12,000 Chinook Salmon, a historically low harvest. The drainage-wide escapement for 2014 was estimated at 124,000 Chinook Salmon. The State of Alaska drainage-wide escapement goal is 65,000–120,000 Chinook Salmon, and the 2015 return is forecasted to be between 96,000 and 163,000 Chinook Salmon. At the upper end of that range, there would be enough fish to meet escapement goals and provide for a moderate Chinook Salmon subsistence harvest. At the lower end of the projected run, however, even a very limited subsistence harvest could impact the likelihood of achieving escapement goals.

The final magnitude of the 2015 Chinook Salmon run is still very uncertain. Based on observations from the Bethel Test Fishery, it is possible that the 2015 Chinook Salmon run is significantly weaker than the 2014 run. Additional precautionary management measures are warranted until the strength of the return can be fully gauged. Presently, both the Bethel Test Fishery and the tagging project near the Johnson River suggest that a higher abundance of Chinook Salmon may be entering the river. However, a closure below Tuluksak is warranted to protect this group of fish as they begin to move up-river towards the spawning grounds. These fish will be moving above Tuluksak in the following weeks and will require further protection. Additional fishing opportunity will be provided once chum and sockeye salmon significantly outnumber Chinook Salmon at the Bethel Test Fishery.

Federally qualified subsistence users can still harvest fish, except Chinook Salmon, within the Refuge boundary using other legal gear types that allow for selective harvest, including dip net, beach seine, fish wheel, or rod and reel.

FEDERAL SUBSISTENCE BOARD

By delegation to:



Neil Lalonde, Refuge Manager
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge