



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 100.10 and .19  
36 CFR 242.10 and .19

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Special Action No.: 3-KS-08-16 Issued at: Bethel, Alaska  
July 7, 2016

Effective Date: July 7, 2015 6:00 p.m.  
Unless superseded by subsequent Special Action

### EXPLANATION:

### **SUBSISTENCE FISHING REGULATIONS ON THE KUSKOKWIM RIVER REVERTS TO ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

The Federal subsistence salmon fisheries on Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River have transitioned from a Chinook salmon fishery to a chum and sockeye salmon fishery. All previously issued Special Actions are now rescinded. Beginning at 6:00 p.m. Thursday July 7, all fisheries in the Kuskokwim River drainage will be managed by the State of Alaska through their Emergency Orders. This action follows the conservation strategy discussed with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Kuskokwim River Inter-tribal Fish Commission.

### REGULATION

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

*For the Kuskokwim area, Federal subsistence fishing schedules, openings, closings, and fishing methods are the same as those issued for the subsistence taking of fish under Alaska Statutes (AS 16.05.060), unless superseded by a Federal Special Action.*

### JUSTIFICATION

#### *Biological*

Harvest management of Federal public waters will transition to a State-managed fishery because most of the 2016 Chinook salmon run has moved upriver of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife

Refuge, and the increased abundance of chum and sockeye salmon in the Kuskokwim River will reduce the likelihood of catching Chinook salmon.

The State of Alaska and US Fish and Wildlife Service drainage-wide escapement goal is 65,000–120,000 Chinook salmon, and the 2016 return is forecasted to be between 125,000 and 219,000 Chinook salmon. Chum and sockeye salmon runs begin later than the Chinook salmon run and this year their combined total has exceeded the number of Chinook salmon at the Bethel Test Fishery every day since June 19, 2016. As of July 7, 2016, the ratio of Chum and Sockeye salmon to Chinook salmon at the Bethel Test Fishery (BTF) has been 10:1 or above for six consecutive days. Historic run timing of Chinook salmon implies that on July 3, 2016, between 83-91% of the Chinook salmon run has passed BTF. Assessed 2016 run timing, coupled with swim speeds estimated from this year's radio telemetry studies, suggest that over 75 percent of the Chinook salmon run will either be in protected tributaries or above the upper Refuge boundary at Aniak by July 6, 2016.

The shared State of Alaska and US Fish and Wildlife Service Kuskokwim River chum salmon escapement goal is 15,000 - 49,000 counted at the Kogrugluk River weir. Preseason, Federally qualified subsistence users were concerned about the Kuskokwim River chum salmon run. Therefore, a conservative preseason harvest management strategy was necessary to protect the continued viability of the population and provide continued subsistence uses of Kuskokwim River chum salmon. In 2015, the chum salmon run was smaller than anticipated and initially resulted in a conservation concern. However, the escapement goal was met. In 2016, the chum salmon run is also smaller than the historic average but as of July 6, the run appears to be larger than last year. The Chum salmon escapement objective for Kuskokwim River has been met since 2001. Also, at this time there is no anticipated commercial fishery on chum salmon. Thus, a cooperative conservative management policy is in place and there is a high likelihood that the escapement goal will be met in 2016.

### *Subsistence*

Salmon, particularly Chinook, are critical to the cultural and traditional needs of people residing in the Kuskokwim River drainage. Harvest by local residents has been severely restricted or eliminated in recent years in an effort to provide stock conservation. This transition to State coordinated management will provide river-wide open access to for all state subsistence users.

The subsistence harvest of salmon has been restricted for several years with varying success to conserve Chinook salmon. This year's estimated harvest to date and future management options were discussed with the KRITFC In-season Management Committee on July 3 and July 6, 2016. The consensus from the meetings with the KRITFC In-season Management Committee and the Federal in-season manager was to allow for more relaxed fishing opportunities. Subsequently on July 7, a meeting with the Chair of KRITFC recommended transitioning to a State managed fishery.

This year's current estimated chum salmon harvest is already more than half the total harvest in 2015 and nearly half of the average total harvest 2004-2014. Aerial surveys of June 26 to July 2 opening documented an effort decline to less than 25% of early season fishing effort. Chinook and chum salmon harvest is expected to have minimal impact on achieving escapement objectives over the remainder of the season due to the reduction in effort and the conservative management strategy discussed with Alaska Department of Fish and Game. This includes retaining tributary closures and conservative subsistence opportunities with gear limitations.

## FEDERAL SUBSISTENCE BOARD

By delegation to:



Vernon Ray Born, Acting Refuge Manager  
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

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