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Federal Subsistence Board News Release

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Federal Public Waters within the Boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

2015 Kuskokwim Area Salmon Fishery News Release 6

The Refuge Manager has issued six previous Emergency Special Actions on the federal waters within and adjacent to Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. The following actions remain in effect until July 20, 2015. Chinook salmon fishery is closed to non-federally qualified users. Chinook salmon fishing on all of the Kuskokwim River and its salmon tributaries remains closed to all user groups. Non-salmon species may be targeted on the Kuskokwim River using set gill nets that are restricted to four-inch or less mesh, not exceeding 60-feet in length, and 45 meshes in depth; this gill net opportunity is only allowed for 72 hours each week from 6:00 a.m. Thursday through 6:00 a.m. Sunday. Gill nets are prohibited on the Kwethluk, Kasigluk, Kisaralik, Tuluksak, and Aniak Rivers and their salmon. With this most recent action, limited subsistence fishing for Chinook salmon will be open.

Management of the Chinook salmon fishery below the Refuge boundary on the Kuskokwim River mouth and above the Refuge boundary on the Kuskokwim River at Aniak is under the authority of the state in-season manager. For more information regarding subsistence fishing in these areas please contact Alaska Department of Fish and Game at 907-543-2433.

Emergency Special Action **3KS-06-15** opens a Chinook salmon fishery with a Community Harvest Permit to federally qualified residents in the Kuskokwim River drainage. A limited harvestable surplus of Chinook salmon has been identified and can be harvest among subsistence users residing in 32 communities in and adjacent to the Kuskokwim River drainage. Eligible communities were identified in the 2015 Alaska National Interest Lands Claims Act Section 804 analysis prepared by the Office of Subsistence Management. 7000 Chinook salmon have been allocated to communities were based on the community's average share of the total subsistence harvest of Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon over the last 20 years. The permit fishery will be from June 10 through June 30, 2015 and Chinook can only be harvested within the boundaries of Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. Permits will be administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge headquarters in Bethel, AK.

Chinook salmon may be targeted using dip-nets, beach seines, fish wheels and gill nets. Gillnets are restricted to six-inch or less mesh, not exceeding 300-feet in length, and 45 meshes in depth and shall be drift net only. Fishers must be in possession of a permit and abide by the permit conditions while fishing. Permit fishing is only permitted in the Kuskokwim River and the Eek River and its salmon tributaries. This permit is not valid on the Kwethluk, Kasigluk, Kisaralik, Tuluksak, and Aniak Rivers and their salmon tributaries.

Sport fishermen may target species other than Chinook salmon using methods and means and limits set in permanent and emergency regulations under the State of Alaska sport fishing regulations. Subsistence fishermen may target species other than Chinook salmon using other legal gear type set in permanent regulation. Legal gear types for other species include dip-net, beach seine, fish wheel, and rod and reel. All Chinook salmon caught with other legal gear types must be released alive and immediately returned to the water.

Biological Rationale

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 but significant harvest during times of low Chinook Salmon abundance. The escapement for 2014 was estimated at 124,000 Chinook Salmon drainage-wide. 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. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a management objective targeting the upper end of the escapement goal range. The midpoint of the preseason forecast suggests a surplus of approximately 15,000 Chinook Salmon may be available in the 2015 subsistence season. We estimate that about 8,000 Chinook Salmon may be harvested incidentally in 2015 during fisheries targeting other species. The remaining potential surplus of 7,000 Chinook Salmon will provide a limited directed opportunity for Federally qualified residents on the Kuskokwim River drainage and the coastal villages of Cheforak, Kipnuk, Kongiganek, and Kwigillingok. This harvest is not anticipated to adversely impact efforts to reach our management objectives.

A dedicated message line with up-to-date fishing regulations on the federal waters of the Kuskokwim drainage can be reached at 907-543-1037. Additional information pertaining to Federal closures can be obtained at http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/topics/kuskokwim_2015.cfm or by contacting Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge at (907) 543-3151 or at (800) 621-5804.

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