



YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

Report to the YK Delta, Western Interior & Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Councils; Fall 2016

Introduction

The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) would like to take this opportunity to share a bit of information about our present programs. As an association of Yukon River subsistence and commercial fishers with the mission of protecting and promoting all healthy fisheries and cultures along the Yukon River we wish to share our great appreciation for the funders that support our efforts.

NEW HIRE

Funded by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and the PEW Charitable Trusts-Wayne Jenkins

YRDFA Board and staff would like to share with our Regional Advisory Council partners that we have hired Danielle Stickman for expanding our communications and outreach work. Danielle was raised in Fairbanks, Anchorage and Nondalton Alaska and has an Environmental Science degree from the University of Hawaii. She has worked with Alaska Geographic, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council, Alaska Forum on the Environment and the Bristol Bay Native Association. Danielle's passions are painting, hiking, running, yoga, traveling, listening to Elders' stories, and spending time with her family, especially her 11-year-old brother. Danielle will be working on education and outreach for YRDFA's Yukon River fisheries efforts and a new project in our continuing work with PEW Charitable Trusts. Stay tuned for more.

Building & Maintaining Public Support of Salmon Resource Management

Funded by US Fish and Wildlife Service through the Yukon River Panel's Resource Management (R&M) Fund-Wayne Jenkins

This project, in its eighth year, has the goal to maintain and improve public support and participation in management of Yukon River salmon within the Alaska portion of the Yukon River basin. Through our annual Board member meeting, which represents and communicates with member's home communities and fishing families the full length of the river, we foster two way communications and information sharing with state and federal managers and fisheries researchers. This program supports better understanding of Yukon River fishery biology, management challenges and objectives, differing river conditions and challenges to meeting subsistence needs and encourages fishing approaches that favor meeting escapement goals in the face of the historical decline in Chinook salmon. We are

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especially focused on meeting our escapement agreements with Canada as these stocks comprise a critical 50% of the spawning population. Using mailings, surveys, our website and Face Book page and individual phone calls and teleconferences we strive to keep communities informed and connected to build support for fisheries management. As a third party, YRDFA coordinates and implements steps to maintain and build mutual understanding and meaningful participation between agencies and the public involved in Yukon River fisheries in Alaska. This program, along with other YRDFA efforts, work together for protecting Yukon River fisheries and cultures during challenging times.

I would be remiss if I did not share our deep respect and admiration for fishers, the full length of the river, for their ongoing restraint, sacrifice and collaboration exhibited over the last several years during the severe restrictions on subsistence harvest of Chinook salmon. Also, we wish to extend gratitude to the fisheries managers for their hard work in difficult geographical, budgetary, and fishery complexity and their deep sensitivity to the needs of Yukon River fishing communities. For the third year the important escapement goal for Canadian bound Chinook salmon was exceeded! The unfolding story on the Yukon River is one of many different people with the same desire, working together to bring Chinook salmon back to a thriving population. We still have a long way to go, but, we have hope we are headed in the right direction.

Pre-season Salmon Fishery Preparation Meeting

**Funded by the Yukon River Panel through the Restoration and Enhancement (R&E) Fund-
Wayne Jenkins**

The YRDFA Pre-Season Salmon Fishery Preparation meetings have been hosted by YRDFA for the past six years and have become an integral and important part of the annual planning cycle for the subsistence and commercial fisheries on the Yukon River. Following the day after the YRDFA Board meeting with an expanded attendance of invitees selected from local communities the full length of the river, fishers, managers, researchers and other stakeholders came together for a full day designed to prepare everyone for the fishing season ahead. The 2016 meeting in Anchorage hosted 82 Yukon River fishers and community representatives and 17 fishery managers and staff.

After review of last year's fishing season and discussion on projections for the runs of summer chum, Chinook salmon, fall chum and Coho, this year's meeting focused on manager's views on best fishing approaches in response to weaker, similar to last year and stronger runs per species. A main area of discussion, with much input from fishers, addressed the Chinook run and how an expected run, similar in size to 2015 could create some opportunity for subsistence harvest and how this might best be accomplished equitably along the length of the river. A post meeting evaluation indicated that, overall, participants were pleased (satisfied or very satisfied) with overall quality of the event (91%), the meeting's value in increasing their understanding of the issues (86%), the scope and usefulness of the information presented (91%), the venue (82%), and food provided (70%). A majority (68%) felt that there was a good balance of time spent listening to presentations and for discussions and networking.

The aim of this year's collaborative efforts by fishers and fishery managers on the Yukon River was to insure the meeting of escapement goals and if possible provide opportunities for some harvest of Chinook salmon with an emphasis on harvest of summer and fall chum for subsistence needs. Indeed, this is what happened with Canadian escapement goals being

surpassed. Some communities were less successful than others in subsistence harvest due to location, high water and fishing timing, debris in the river and other factors, yet overall reports from the river communities reflect much gratitude for management approaches this year

In-season Yukon River Salmon Teleconferences

Funded by the Office of Subsistence Management, Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) and the Yukon River Panel through the Restoration and Enhancement (R&E)

Fund-Wayne Jenkins

Since its inception in 2000, the In-season Salmon Management Teleconference Program (Teleconferences) has provided a practical and useful method for fishers, processors, managers, and other stakeholders in Yukon River salmon fisheries to discuss the complexities of salmon management and gain immediate real-time information across the more than 2,000 mile expanse of the Yukon River. Facilitated by the YRDFA, these teleconferences have enabled local users to provide valuable insight to fisheries managers on in-season salmon subsistence needs, river conditions, and abundance and quality of salmon available. Information from the fishers allows managers to adjust timing and gear types for meeting their management goals. Additionally, subsistence users gain a better understanding of the different research projects and management tools the state and federal managers are utilizing and the status of fishing conditions in other areas of the drainage. Members of the public, Yukon River fishers and community members, state and federal agencies, tribal Governments and tribal consortia, fish processors and others have participated in in-season salmon management teleconferences since they have been initiated. The Fisheries Resources Monitoring Program (FRMP) funds these calls in conjunction with the Yukon River Panel. As this program has evolved it has become a regular fixture of in-season salmon management, with calls once a week on the same day and same time each week, that fishing families and communities as well as fisheries managers have come to rely on.

There are approximately 45 communities in Alaska and 10 First Nations in Canada that harvest salmon along the Yukon River for food, as part of their cultural identity and income. This project brings together these remote and rural villages that share the salmon resource. They share information with each other and also firsthand knowledge about what is happening on the river with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) that manage the fisheries. This project hosts teleconferences in a cost-effective method for bringing people together on a consistent basis to speak weekly about river-fishery issues and approaches. The project is long-standing at 16 years. Changes are taking place along the Yukon River due to environmental conditions and management actions related to low Chinook salmon runs. This project is needed to continue to gather information related to these changes during the fishing season. Managers hear firsthand about conditions on the river and learn about how communities are doing in their fishing efforts or they learn how prepared or unprepared communities are for the new and adaptive management strategies being utilized. This information assists fisheries managers in their daily management of the salmon resource, especially during years of conservative Chinook salmon management.

There is value in having a public forum that is accessible to the people of the Yukon River to call in to hear first-hand about the status of the salmon fisheries. While there are other methods such as faxes and e-mail news releases that are sent out to communities, this is the only toll free number that a person can call in and speak with the managers in a weekly forum. The total

number of participants in the YRDFA 2016 Teleconferences was 857 callers the 13 weeks of the calls. An average of 66 callers per/call participated with the highest numbers, 84-99 per-call occurring in June, early in the runs, reflecting the deep interest communities have around Chinook salmon. In July as multiple Chinook pulses had passed many lower and middle river communities call-ins drop into the 70's and by the last week in August call numbers were in the mid-thirties this year. This is the usual pattern.

Not only does this weekly call bring together people along the U.S. portion of the Yukon River, but we include Canadian fisheries management as well as First Nation communities that find value in learning about the beginning of the run as it enters the Yukon River and following the run as it progresses through the Alaskan portion of the Yukon. They learn in advance about what to expect at the Canadian border. As the Chinook salmon runs are being conservatively managed and people along the Alaskan portion of the Yukon River are being asked to not harvest this valuable species, the Canadian fishing families in Yukon have listened in on the difficult conversations taking place during the summer season. They have been able to say thank you to the Alaskans for their sacrifices to get enough Canadian origin Chinook salmon to the border to meet our treaty obligations with Canada. We have seen cooperation in recent years when communications efforts have been increased to include local people who fish, in the discussions about fisheries management. This project is important for building relationships within Alaska and across the border into Canada in order to continue to sustain the salmon populations for today and for future generations.

YRDFA Yukon River Community Engagement Support for BLM Resource Management Planning

Funded by PEW Charitable Trusts-Wayne Jenkins

In July of 2014 YRDFA began assisting Yukon River communities with engagement in the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Resource Management Planning process (RMP). All federal land management agencies are directed by Congress by the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 to create Resource Management Plans for guiding management decisions, usually over the next 15-20 years. The planning process is public and seeks through direct engagement to gain input on issues and concerns and any and all information pertinent to the management of the public's lands the agency is responsible for. In the US, BLM, which is within the Department of Interior, administers over 247 million acres; over 72 million acres are in Alaska within eight planning regions. Three of these include portions of the Yukon River and are in active planning mode; the Eastern Interior, the Central Yukon and the Bering Sea-Western Interior regions.

YRDFA's community support work is focused on the Central Yukon and Bering Sea-Western Interior RMP processes and is useful as the process is complicated and full of difficult to comprehend jargon, BLM is short on staff and local capacity to understand and bring important issues forward are challenged due to the many issues and responsibilities which already exist. Early on, tribal councils and communities, after coming to better understand the BLM planning process, made it clear that their main concerns were access to and protection of traditional use areas.

BLM has a management designation called Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or ACEC's. Establishing an **Area of Critical Environmental Concern** is a way to provide special

management for fish and wildlife resources or other important values on public lands. They are also created to conserve or prevent damage to important historic, cultural, or to protect fragile landscapes and sensitive ecosystems. PEW Trusts and YRDFA felt this designation was a good fit for the critically important areas that local communities had depended upon for thousands of years, presently use and are necessary for carrying their culture forward.

Requests were made to individual Native communities with a million or more acres of BLM lands within fifty miles for meeting with tribal councils and community members for discussing further protection of traditional use areas and these areas were mapped by use and watershed. Sometimes mapping already existed in studies done by ADFG in collaboration with the tribe and community and were very helpful. ADFG traditional land use mapping included maps for large mammals-bear and moose, small mammals, salmon and non-salmon fish species, birds and waterfowl and greens and berries. We added to this list, areas important for drinking water, fish spawning areas and wood gathering areas. Once the watersheds were identified they were overlaid on BLM managed lands and these areas were nominated by the tribal councils for ACEC designation.

The communities on the Yukon River which have to date made ACEC nominations are Marshall, Holy Cross, Koyukuk and Ohogamiut which have nominated a collective total of 6.5 million acres in the Bering Sea-Western Interior BLM planning region. Loudon, Ruby and Huslia tribal councils have nominated 3.7 million acres so far with the village of Hughes nomination in process in the Central Yukon BLM planning region. It should be noted that some of these nominated areas overlap. Also the Yukon River villages of Anvik, Grayling and Nulato have nominated ACEC's working with Suzanne Little, PEW's Alaska Field Officer.

The desire of the tribal governments and their communities in making ACEC nominations is to increase BLM's understanding of the importance of these areas, request their protection through the Resource Management Planning and ACEC process and as a way to address the federal government's trust responsibility with tribal nations. We are interested in working with other Yukon and Kuskokwim River communities for improved engagement with BLM in the planning regions mentioned. Contact Wayne Jenkins at YRDFA for details. Also see our Face Book page, Our Land, Our Voice, Our Future.

Yukon River In-Season Salmon Harvest Survey

Funded by the Office of Subsistence Management, Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP)-Catherine Moncrieff

The YRDFA In-season Community Surveyor Program is an important communication tool in that it qualitatively informs managers how fishers in key locations throughout the drainage are doing in-season, enabling managers to make timely decisions allowing the maximum number of fishers to meet their subsistence needs. Our surveyors gather information directly from fishermen, providing managers with weekly information about fishers' concerns, observations, and their ability to harvest salmon throughout the Alaskan portion of the Yukon River drainage. These reports are also shared on the YRDFA In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences (Teleconferences) for the benefit of managers and other fishermen. The community surveyor reports address the need to have consistent reporting to fisheries managers and the public about subsistence harvests, run strength, fishing conditions, and fishermen's concerns. They also ensure consistent participation and reporting each week regarding subsistence harvests and

observed abundance on the Teleconferences. These in-season surveys were implemented to assist in meeting the mandate set forth in the Alaska Native Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and the State of Alaska Statute 16.05.258 *Subsistence use and allocation of fish and game*, both of which require a priority for subsistence over other consumptive uses. This program has been in existence since 2002 and has evolved over time to meet the changing needs on the river. With this most recent 4-year funding from the FRMP, the program is responding to feedback from the managers and the fishers, becoming an adaptive communication program maximizing fishers’ voices and enabling managers to send important conservation messages directly into fisher’s households in 10 key villages. The program goal is to contribute local information into fisheries management discussions and build capacity along the river to participate in fisheries management.

The 2016 In-season survey program was fully funded through the FRMP and we accomplished our objectives of hiring 10 community surveyors in 10 Yukon River villages to work during the Chinook salmon season in their villages, to build the capacity of our surveyors through training and support, and to conduct annual reviews to maximize the program’s effectiveness. Three communities were new to the program this year (Mountain Village, Anvik, and Tanana) and there were four new local hires (Alakanuk, Ruby, Huslia, and Eagle). To increase the effectiveness of the community surveyors to participate in fisheries management, nine of them attended the Yukon River Pre-season Planning Meeting and surveyor training event and the tenth one, not yet hired, was trained by a supervisor who attended in their place. YRDFA staff also provided support to the surveyors in-season. A pre-season evaluation was completed in the spring and the annual post-season evaluation is underway. Recommendations for next season will be summarized from the evaluations. A total of 100 households were surveyed in 10 Yukon River villages over a 6-week period with a total of 375 interviews. The survey ran from May 30th to Aug 8th, 2016. The table below shows the villages, number of households surveyed, total number of interviews per village and the date range our program was operating in each community.

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association 2016 In-Season Salmon Survey			
Village	# of households interviewed	# of interviews total	date range
Alakanuk	12	65	May 30-July 4
Mountain Village	2	2	May 30-July 4
Marshall	15	85	May 30-July 4
Russian Mission	20	35	May 30-July 4
Anvik	8	12	June 13-June 20
Ruby	9	36	June 13-July 18
Huslia	5	29	June 20-July 18
Tanana	7	31	June 20-Aug 1
Fort Yukon	18	52	June 20-Aug 1
Eagle	4	28	June 27-Aug 8
Totals	100	375	May 30-Aug 8

This season the surveyors reported that fishermen in their communities were disappointed in their ability to fish on the early part of the Chinook salmon run or the closures on the “tricklers,” before the first pulse arrived. There were many requests up and down the river to provide more opportunity for fishing. Once the Chinook salmon arrived and the first part of the run passed, most fishermen reported ending the season with better fishing than compared to the last two years. A gear type question was added to the survey this year so we were able to report weekly information on the different gear types being used in different villages.

Next steps for this project are to complete the evaluation and make recommendations for the 2017 season. In the spring of 2017, community surveyors will travel to the Yukon River Pre-Season Planning meeting and also attend a Surveyor Training event. Survey forms and other materials will be revised and prepared over the winter in preparation for the training event.

Customary Trade in the Upper Yukon River
Funded by the Office of Subsistence Management, Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) - Catherine Moncrieff

The salmon fishery on the Yukon River is extremely complex. It is one of the largest subsistence fisheries in the state, and salmon fishing is a central component of the socio-economic profile of most families and communities in the Yukon River region. The commercial fishing that largely occurs in the lower parts of the river supports subsistence economies by providing much needed cash to buy equipment and supplies that are often reinvested in subsistence activities. In areas like the upper Yukon River not supported by commercial fishing, customary trade may be one of the only sources of cash income or trade for necessary supplies. Further, recent research on customary trade (Fienup-Riordan 1986, Magdanz et. al 2007, Moncrieff 2007) suggests that customary trade plays a long-term and important role in the continuum of exchange that serves to distribute subsistence resources within and between communities. However, the importance of customary trade varies by area (Krieg et al. 2007).

Low numbers of returning Chinook salmon to the Yukon River over the last decade have raised concerns about the practice of customary trade. The Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) and the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) have been working on clarifying enforceable regulations that provide for and protect the traditional practices of customary trade of subsistence-harvested fish, while minimizing the potential for commercialization of subsistence fish. Concerns of the Yukon River Panel, the Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee and the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council and others led to the formation of a Tri-Regional Advisory Council subcommittee to explore potential customary trade regulatory changes and resulted in several proposals before the FSB in January of 2013. At this meeting, the Board restricted the customary trade of Yukon River Chinook salmon to transactions between those who have a customary and traditional use determination—that is, between residents of rural communities. They also identified the need for additional information on the scope and local nature of customary trade of fish throughout the Yukon River.

This project addresses the need identified by the FSB for additional information on customary trade of fish throughout the Yukon River and builds on earlier research on customary trade in the region (Moncrieff 2007), focusing specifically on the historic and contemporary customary trade of salmon in the Upper Yukon and Tanana Rivers. Funded by the FRMP, it is a partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Subsistence Division. Ethnographic interviews

will be used to describe how customary trade practices fit within the overall subsistence use of salmon and a survey on barter and exchange practices will document the scope and local nature of customary trade. Project investigators will use this data to improve understanding of the role of customary trade within a continuum of exchange practices and to describe any potential effects on customary trade from declining salmon runs.

This project, originally set to end in December of 2016, has been extended to June of 2017 to include the additional community of Venetie, and to complete the analysis, community reviews, and final reporting. We have received approval to work in Venetie and plan to conduct that fieldwork in October. To date, we have completed our fieldwork in Fort Yukon, Manley Hot Springs and Stevens Village and are drafting community chapters and the analysis. Once we have completed these draft results, we will revisit each community to share the preliminary findings and collect their feedback. We will continue to provide updates to our Council through the end of the project.

How People of the Yukon River Value Salmon: A case study in the lower, middle, and upper portions of the Yukon River.

Funded by the North Pacific Research Board- Catherine Moncrieff

People along the Yukon River rely on salmon for food, culture and income. It is well known that salmon has a high value to the subsistence users along the Yukon River but the details of this value have not been well described. Fisheries managers are faced with challenging decisions about how to balance the need for people to have limited access to the natural resources they depend on and the need to sustain the salmon run for future generations. Through this project Yukon River fishing families have the opportunity to share how they value salmon, why they value salmon and the ways in which it is most important to them. Increasing understanding of how, why, and in what ways salmon are valued by the people of the Yukon River and the role it plays in their lives will enable the NPRB and fishery managers to increase their understanding of values that can shape the future of salmon fisheries management.

Case studies are being developed through ethnographic interviews in Russian Mission, Nenana, and Fort Yukon. The ethnographic interviews have been completed in all three communities and draft chapters for Nenana and Fort Yukon are complete and draft chapters have been shared with the respective communities. Most recently in June, a workshop was held in Fort Yukon with seven knowledgeable fishers to review their draft chapter. During this 4-hour workshop, we reviewed the entire chapter, gathered great feedback and made additions. The chapter has been revised with their comments and sent back for distribution and further comments. Next steps are to complete the analysis of the interviews and draft the chapter for Russian Mission. Once this is completed, I will travel to Russian Mission and present a draft summary. As in Fort Yukon and Nenana, community members will have the opportunity to provide feedback and their comments will be incorporated into the final draft. This project, originally set to end Dec 2016, has been extended to December of 2017 to allow time for quality community reviews and publication.

Traditional Knowledge in Federal Fisheries Management – paper
Funded by Pew/Kawerik, Inc. - Catherine Moncrieff

YRDFA was invited by Kawerik, Inc. (the Nome area non-profit) to partner with them on an article, funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, that examines ways that Traditional Knowledge (TK) can be used in federal fisheries management, particularly the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC). The article will provide an overview of what TK is, describe existing documented TK for the Yukon River and Bering Sea region, suggest mechanisms for improving consultation between indigenous communities and the NPFMC and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service. It will also examine opportunities for greater involvement of indigenous communities in federal fisheries management and how TK can help inform NPFMC deliberations on fisheries management, including minimizing negative impacts to subsistence communities of proposed management decisions, and strategies for adapting to the impacts of climate change.

The final product for this project is a paper submission to a peer-reviewed journal. Thus far, we held workshop in Russian Mission and Golovin to get community feedback on our draft paper and recommendations. We also met with NPFMC staff to hear their ideas and to learn about interactions they have had so far with TK. And finally we have shared our draft with our contact at PEW and received their feedback. Next steps are to incorporate the community ideas, Council, and Pew feedback and finalize the paper to be submitted to a journal in the near future.

Yukon River Salmon Declines: Learning from Tradition- workshop
Funded by National Science Foundation. - Catherine Moncrieff

We have recently received funding to hold a workshop with Lower Yukon River Elders, in Yup'ik, about Chinook salmon. This project is in partnership with Calista Education and Culture (CEC) and will take place in Anchorage in late January 2017. The focus of the workshop will be Elder knowledge of the salmon and salmon fishing; discussing the history, changes, traditional place names, harvest patterns, diet and food preparation, traditional fishing practices, weather, river conditions, other animal and plant communities related to these practices, as well as other relevant topics. This project is modeled after the very successful Yup'ik Environmental Knowledge Project carried out by CEC. Part of the project will be to transcribe all of the recordings from the knowledge workshop. Currently we are contacting the Tribal Councils and nominated Elders to discuss selection of our 4-6 participants who will travel to Anchorage and participate. Later we will be reaching out to Yukon River managers to gather their feedback on discussion points for the gathering. Results will be shared widely with communities, managers, scientists, and other interested parties.

Community Helper Program
Funded by Alaska Department of Fish and Game. – Richell Carmichael

Since 2013 YRDFA has worked with ADF&G to assist them with their end of season harvest survey program. We are continuing this work this fall. Through this grant YRDFA hires contractors in each of the 33 Yukon area villages to provide local support for the ADF&G surveyors. The surveyors are conducting the annual subsistence salmon harvest surveys over the course of 2 months. Work for the assistant hired is brief but very valuable. They are

guaranteed 4 hours of work and can work up to as much as 20 hours depending on the size of the community. Having the local knowledge of the assistants each year has helped the ADF&G survey process immensely, and we are happy to have another opportunity to connect with the people of the Yukon River.

In closing

YRDFA Board and staff would like to thank each council member of the three Federal Subsistence Management Regional Advisory Councils that work to protect the cultural values, habitat and subsistence way of life in the Yukon River drainage of Alaska. As always, we welcome your ideas and suggestions of projects for YRDFA that would enhance or benefit the Yukon River people and fisheries. We appreciate your support and look forward to continuing our work with you and being a small part of making a positive difference in the lives of those we serve.

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