



Report to the RAC | Winter Meeting 2025

Last updated February 3, 2025

The Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) is a P.L. 93-638 contracted, 501(c)3 organization representing the 33 federally recognized Tribes of the Kuskokwim River watershed in fisheries management, research, and monitoring. KRITFC works to protect and sustain our Kuskokwim salmon fisheries and traditional ways of life using Traditional and Indigenous Knowledge and the best available Western science.

KRITFC would like to provide you with the following updates for you as we head into the 2025 salmon season.

KRITFC Leadership and Staff

Our current Executive Council members are Betty Magnuson (Unit 1–McGrath), Jonathan Samuelson (Unit 2–Georgetown; Chair), Tracy Simeon (Unit 3– Chuathbaluk), Mike Williams Sr. (Unit 4–Akiak; Vice-Chair), Henry Hunter Sr. (Unit 5–ONC/Bethel), Ralph Nelson (Unit 6–Napakiak), and Paul Cleveland (Unit 7–Quinhagak; Secretary/Treasurer).

Our current In-Season Managers are Betty Magnuson (Upper River/Headwaters–McGrath), Megan Leary (Middle River–Napaimute), Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River–Akiak), Henry Hunter Sr. (Bethel Area–ONC/Bethel), and Paul Cleveland (Tundra/Coast–Quinhagak).

Our current Elder Advisors are Caqqaq James Nicori (Kwethluk) and Nick Alexia Sr (Nikolai).



KRITFC Commissioners, Elder Advisor, and Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Chair Ed Johnstone at the 2024 KRITFC Annual Meeting.

Our **current full-time staff** includes:

- Kevin Whitworth, Executive Director

- Justin Leon, Research Director
- Andrew Magel, Fisheries Biologist
- Avery Hoffman, Fisheries Biologist
- Daniel O'Connor, Fisheries Technician/Jesuit Volunteer
- Terese Vicente, Policy & Programs Director
- Elyssa Loughlin, Communications Coordinator

We are grateful for the additional support of contractual accountants, finance managers, biometricians, and science and policy support.

2025 KRITFC-YDNWR Salmon Management



In-season management meeting on July 31, 2024.
(Photo: Amy Cook)

KRITFC looks forward to continuing our collaborative in-season management in 2025 with our partners at the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) at Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR). This will be our 10th season of cooperative Tribal-Federal salmon management with YDNWR.

As part of our collaborative management and grounded in Traditional Knowledge, local observations, and the best available Western science, our 5 Tribal In-Season Managers, support staff, and YDNWR's fisheries management team plan to utilize our joint Salmon Management Strategy and Harvest Strategy to guide precautionary salmon management. Our team will

closely monitor Kuskokwim salmon runs with an ultimate goal of providing as many subsistence harvest opportunities as possible while conserving Chinook, chum, and coho salmon populations for future generations.

As we approach the salmon season and begin pre-season management meetings with YDNWR, we will have more to share about subsistence fishing opportunities this summer.

Advocacy & Outreach for Salmon Conservation and Restoration

KRITFC is committed to stewarding our salmon using an ecosystem-wide approach, caring for our salmon from their time in the gravel as eggs until they return to the gravel as spawners. Beyond our in-river management, a significant piece of our stewardship involves working at the local, state, Congressional, and federal levels for conservation and restoration at all stages of the salmon life cycle.

Some of our recent salmon advocacy, outreach, and policy work includes:

- **Chum Salmon Bycatch Management & EIS Process:** Currently, chum salmon bycatch reductions are managed by the pollock trawl fishery, and there is no cap on chum salmon bycatch. In **July 2023**, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) began a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the reevaluation of chum bycatch

management. KRITFC is a cooperating agency in this EIS process, helping staff develop sections of the EIS analyses per our special expertise of Kuskokwim salmon. In **February 2025**, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) reviewed a preliminary draft EIS examining 5 different management alternatives to reduce chum salmon bycatch—two of which focus on a Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limit, or hard cap. *(At the time of this writing, the NPFMC has not met and chosen a pathway forward. The RAC will hear a presentation about the NPFMC's decisions from the NPFMC staff and cooperating agencies at this meeting.)*

- **Gravel-to-Gravel Keystone Initiative:** KRITFC is proud to be a partner in the Gravel-to-Gravel Keystone Initiative, in which Tribes and federal agencies throughout the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim region are collaborating to restore and care for salmon, from eggs to spawners. On **October 16, 2024**, we signed an MOU with the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC), Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments (CATG), Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (YRITFC), Native Village of Eagle, Kawerak Inc., Nome Eskimo Community, USFWS, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and US Geological Survey (USGS). This MOU spells out our agreements to collaborate and communicate with one another, build relationship, honor Tribal sovereignty and self-governance, and work in partnership for salmon and the ecosystem.
- **North Pacific Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS):** KRITFC is encouraging the NPFMC and NMFS to update their 20-year-old management framework for the North Pacific (called the 2024 Programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, or PSEIS) so that Alaska marine fisheries management better accounts for ecosystem changes, climate resiliency, and Alaska Native knowledge systems and subsistence needs. The NPFMC will discuss next steps for the PEIS process at its **April 2025** meeting.

Additionally, we are in conversations with regional partners and Tribes about the upcoming call for proposals for the 2026 South Alaska Peninsula (Area M) Board of Fisheries (BOF) meeting. Proposals for this meeting are due **April 10, 2025**.

2025 Salmon Research, Monitoring, and Knowledge Documentation Projects

- In 2025, KRITFC, in partnership with Dr. Daniel Auerbach of Washington State University (WSU), plans to explore the ability of **stationary camera systems** to count salmon spawners. We first plan to test the efficacy of the camera systems on the Kwethluk River and train residents to operate these camera systems before expanding this technology and method of spawner assessment to different communities and rivers across the Kuskokwim watershed. This work is built upon the **drone spawner assessment project** launched in 2024, in which Dr. Auerbach, WSU researchers, and KRITFC staff rafted 90 miles over 11 days on the Kwethluk River to explore the ability to count salmon spawners with drones. Almost 60,000 images were collected across 60 contiguous miles of the Kwethluk River, and they are currently being analyzed to complete fish counts and habitat assessments and assist in the development of artificial intelligence technology to count fish from photo/video. KRITFC looks forward to continuing to explore these alternative and innovative



Dr. Daniel Auerbach (left) and Avery Hoffman (right) fly the drone on the Kwethluk River. (Photo: Andrew Magel)

spawner assessment methods in 2025. Funding for this project is provided by the United States Geological Survey.

- KRITFC and partners at Ocean Conservancy and University of Alaska Fairbanks–Tamamta Program are wrapping up the “Knowledge of Kuskokwim Salmon and People” project, which sought to **document Indigenous Knowledge of salmon and Tribes’ recommendations for improving ecosystem-wide salmon management**. We completed Knowledge Holder interviews in summer 2024 and convened a workshop with our team and Knowledge Holders in November 2024 to review our initial draft products, which include StoryMaps, visuals of natural indicators, online maps of significant salmon sites throughout the Kuskokwim, and policy recommendations. Our project team is in the final stages of this project, which includes re-visiting Knowledge Holders and communities to share updates and finalize our products in collaboration with our Knowledge Holders. We anticipate having products to share with the public, including this RAC, during summer 2025. Funding for this project was provided by the Lenfest Ocean Program.
- The **Community-Based Harvest Monitoring (CBHM) program** hires local Tribal citizens to collect post-harvest data from local subsistence fishermen, which is used by federal managers for their decision-making. KRITFC partners with lower river communities (including Eek, Tuntutuliak, Napakiak, Napaskiak, Kwethluk, Akiachak, Akiak, and Tuluksak), Orutsararmut Native Council (ONC) in Bethel, and YDNWR to estimate in-season harvests to inform salmon run strength and timing. In 2025, we hope to continue the expansion of the CBHM project started in 2023, with increased participation and coverage from lower river communities and monitoring of the Chinook, chum, and coho salmon runs. This project is funded by the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP).
- The **Kwethluk River Freshwater Production (Screw Trap) Study** counts juvenile salmon smolt as they migrate out of the Kwethluk River toward the ocean and compares these data to numbers of adult salmon returning to the Kwethluk River to spawn. KRITFC hires residents from lower Kuskokwim River communities, such as Kwethluk and Tuluksak, to operate this project. KRITFC is looking forward to partnering with USFWS and Organized Village of Kwethluk (OVK) to operate the screw trap from spring through early summer this year. This project is run by KRITFC through congressional appropriations funding.
- The **Kwethluk River weir** counts adult salmon migrating into the Kwethluk—historically the second most productive tributary in the Kuskokwim watershed—to spawn. This escapement data is important for calculating the annual Chinook salmon run reconstruction, and it may also provide understanding on the impacts of marine commercial fishing intercept and bycatch on salmon abundance. During the 2024 season, the weir did not operate due to high water, but USFWS and KRITFC hope to operate the weir in 2025. Funding for this project in 2025 is still being determined.



Debby Hartman and Betty Magnuson in McGrath June 11, 2024. (Photo: Terese Vicente)

- In 2024, the **water temperature monitoring project** contributed toward efforts to collect water temperatures from across the Kuskokwim River watershed to explore the effects of climate change on Kuskokwim ecosystems and fisheries. KRITFC partnered with Cook Inlet Keeper, Native Village of Napaimute, and the Native Village of Georgetown for this project. Temperature measurements were made from June to September on the mainstem Kuskokwim around Bethel and on the Kwethluk and Takotna Rivers. In 2025, KRITFC aims to expand to more locations and refine its methods for data collection on the mainstem Kuskokwim. Funding for this project is provided by USFWS.
- The **Takotna River weir** is the only long-term headwaters stock assessment program, and its data are used to help calculate the annual Chinook salmon run reconstruction. KRITFC hires residents to install and operate the weir, and we are looking forward to partnering with Takotna Tribal Council to operate the weir this summer. In 2024, this weir was only partially active due to high water. The 2025 season will be the ninth season KRITFC has collaborated on this project, and the second of full Tribal ownership and operation through KRITFC. This project is funded by the FRMP.
- The **Environmental DNA (eDNA) project** filters water samples from tributaries to collect salmon DNA and estimate species abundance. Now in its fourth year of operation, in 2025, KRITFC will partner with the University of Alaska Fairbanks–International Arctic Research Center, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and USFWS to collect samples at the George, Kwethluk, and Takotna River weir sites as well as to analyze the results from previously collected data. This project is funded by the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative (AYK SSI).



Justin Leon installs a temperature logger. (Photo: Andrew Magel)

Events Coming Up

- **March 31–April 7, 2025:** North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting, will the PEIS in Anchorage, AK and via Zoom.
- **April 2–4, 2025:** KRITFC Annual Meeting and Elections
- **April 10, 2025:** Board of Fisheries proposals for the Kuskokwim region and Area M due. Proposals will be deliberated at meetings in fall 2025 and winter 2026.
- **April 28–May 2, 2025:** North Pacific Marine Resources Education Program. Free workshop (all travel/expenses covered) to learn about the NPFMC process. Learn more and apply at mrep.gmri.org/apply.
- **May 2025:** Countdown to breakup, arrival of king salmon, and beginning of KRITFC-USFWS collaborative salmon management

As we approach the salmon season, keep in touch with us:
www.kuskosalmon.org | Facebook: [@KuskoSalmon](https://www.facebook.com/KuskoSalmon) | Instagram: [@KuskoSalmon](https://www.instagram.com/KuskoSalmon) | Office: 907-545-7388

Quyana, Dogidinh, Chin'an, Tsen'anh, Thank You!