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***Report to Regional Advisory Councils
Fall 2025***

YRDFA PROJECTS

In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences:

YRDFA has been facilitating the in-season salmon management teleconferences since 2000. The teleconference calls offer stakeholders the opportunity to get first-hand information during the fishing season, have their management questions addressed, and to share traditional ecological knowledge. In a rural and remote area as large as the Yukon River, the in-season salmon management call offers a relatively inexpensive and efficient manner to bring together agency professionals with resource stakeholders across a large geographic area in a meaningful approach to prevent and mitigate conflict.

The calls include Canadian agency and community counterparts. While outside the jurisdiction of the U.S. federal subsistence management program, the in-season salmon management teleconferences promote international cooperation between organizations and individuals facing common salmon management conservation and management challenges.

The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) has hosted in-season salmon management teleconferences since before 1999. Other ongoing efforts to keep fishermen engaged, informed and educated about Yukon River salmon fisheries management have also been hosted by YRDFA such as in-person meetings and in recent years through social media tools. Other tribal organizations and university departments host meetings and workshops to discuss fisheries management and regulatory decision making during the off-season. The in-season salmon management teleconferences build on these efforts by hosting a dialogue among active and current fishermen and women from Yukon River communities. The calls enable people who

have participated in multiple efforts to share information between stakeholders and agencies to continue to build their knowledge of in-season fisheries management, skills in active listening, public speaking and experience in participating in public forums.

The multi-year fisheries disasters have taken a toll on everyone along the Yukon River. The 2025 teleconference season was faced with moderate participation along the Yukon River, but low active participation. Our funding has shifted from donations from other Yukon River organizations and agencies over the last few years. The 2025 season was funded by the Tanana Chiefs Conference and the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. It is unsure at this time if we will be able to host the teleconferences for 2026.

Harvest Survey Program

In 2024 the survey program was funded by the National Park Service and began in 2002. We have 10 communities along the Yukon River with locally hired surveyors. Starting in June running through the last week of August, surveyors interviewed local households about their experience fishing that week. Households are kept anonymous and the same survey questions are asked every week. Interviews are sent to us at the beginning of the week. The data collected is then analyzed and put into a report that is sent out to partners and management agencies. This year we launched a digital app for surveyors to use. As for the 2025 season, we have applied for two sources of funding and are waiting to hear back. If no additional funding comes through we will scale back the program and run it as a skeleton operation.

This season, we worked with six communities: Alakanuk, Marshall, Mountain Village, Huslia, Tanana, and Eagle. For the first time, we rolled out a new non-fishing survey form. This lets YRDFA capture the experiences of households that didn't fish, how they're staying connected to the river and how fishing restrictions are impacting food security. Each week, a locally hired surveyor started by asking members of their community if their household fished. If they had, they used the fishing form. If not, they used the non-fishing form. Over the season, we collected 99 reports: 80 of those were non-fishing, and only 19 were fishing. The top reasons for not fishing were closures and personal circumstances. For those who did fish, most were using 4-inch nets to target non-salmon species, and the majority told us their harvest wasn't meeting their needs.

Yukon River Watershed Ecosystem Action Plan

In 2023, established with funding from the Gravel to Gravel Initiative, the steering committee's purpose is to create a publicly accessible 'story map tool, a resource that prioritizes assessing threats to salmon habitat and identifying the highest-priority restoration actions. This tool will be open to all, fostering a sense of community and

shared responsibility for the Yukon watershed, with the overall commitment to assist YRDFA in creating a Yukon River Ecosystem Action Plan.

July 14-17, 2025, members of the YRDFA team flew to Beaver and conducted water sampling along the Yukon river near town and in Lower Mouth Birch Creek in order to gather baseline data in response to the Hillcorp/Doyon Yukon Flats Exploration project. In addition, members tested the Yukon river near Beaver for the presence of Cyanide. Our Cyanide tests thankfully showed very low levels present. At 0.006 milligrams per liter it was well below the drinking water threshold set by the EPA of 0.2 milligrams per liter. Therefore our staff currently does not see a cause for concern regarding Cyanide in that area.

The other water tests we conducted looked at temperature, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, PH, and conductivity. Combined, these numbers can help us determine the quality of water for salmon habitat. The results of these tests in both the Yukon and in the Lower Mouth Birch Creek for dissolved oxygen, turbidity, PH and conductivity were all very good and within the recommended range for salmon productivity. The temperature, however, in both the main stem of the Yukon and Lower Mouth Birch Creek were high. Salmon need cooler water, between 5 and 16 degrees Celsius, depending on their life cycle stage. Temperatures above 16 degrees Celsius start to stress the fish. In the Yukon, temperatures were taken across the river and at different depths and the temperature was consistent at 17.1° C or 62° F. In Lower Mouth Birch Creek the temperature was 18.28° C or 65° F throughout the water column.

Staff deployed temperature water loggers in Birch Creek that will monitor water temperatures for the rest of the season.

Engaging Fishers in Chinook Salmon Research on the Yukon River

This project, funded by the North Pacific Research Board, began in January 2023 and ends in February of 2026. We are partnering with the communities of Alakanuk and Emmonak to conduct interviews about the health of Chinook as they enter the river. We are gathering this information to help inform our companion project, led by Dr. Katie Howard and Vanessa von Biela, which is seeking to understand the drivers of Chinook salmon decline and they theorize that one driver is their diet in the Bering Sea and which is strongly related to their health when they enter the river. We have completed our interviews in both Emmonak and Alakanuk and provided summaries of the results to the participants and tribal councils. We plan to travel to Alakanuk and Emmonak in March to hold community meetings and gather feedback from the communities.

In 2023, interviews were conducted by Catherine Moncrieff to document what fishers were observing as these salmon entered the river. In March 2025, Catherine and other

YRDFA staff traveled to Alakanuk and Emmonak to share those findings and gather feedback from the community. Another key component of this project is establishing water temperature monitoring sites and creating a community rapid response team. In June, YRDFA staff traveled to St. Mary's and Huslia, where we deployed temperature loggers that will remain in the river until September.

In June of 2025 a group of YRDFA staff went to St. Mary's and Huslia to conduct the final community meetings. During this meeting coordination of a heat response team was discussed and a standard operating procedure was drafted to respond to water temperatures that can be lethal for salmon swimming to their spawning grounds. [A](#)

Exploring Linkages Between a Changing Climate and Productivity of Yukon River Chinook Salmon *in Partnership with ADF&G*

We worked with communities of St. Mary's and Huslia and identified individuals who have the local expertise and interest for participating in field sampling for this project. YRDFA contracted local stakeholders to collect samples alongside project biologists in the most effective and sensitive manner (no additional pre-spawn salmon mortality). Community leadership are supporting this project, as evidenced by the letters of support, and will be key to ensuring effective community involvement. YRDFA also facilitated bridging the gap between salmon stakeholders and project investigators through a variety of opportunities to join community and tribal meetings. Since much of the data collected under this proposal will be novel and lacks a pre-decline baseline, YRDFA is also leading a companion project (also submitted to NPRB, "Engaging Yukon River Fishers in Research on Chinook Salmon Declines") that seeks to collect traditional ecological knowledge about historical changes to the health of Yukon River Chinook salmon from communities who observe these fish near river entry.

This project is in its final year. Since we were unable to collect little to no carcasses to sample in both drainages due to the low abundance we shifted our final sampling location to the Anvik River. A team was out in the field in mid-August and we will have a comprehensive report that will deliver the findings next year.

Yukon River Watershed Clearinghouse: A culturally responsive monitoring program

The Yukon River Watershed Clearinghouse project, funded by the State of Alaska. The goal of this project is to establish a clearinghouse that allows for tracking of both social and ecological changes in ways that are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of the people of the Yukon River watershed. Ultimately we will have a database storing Yukon specific information and help us identify hot spots that need attention to protect salmon.

A strategic planning session to carefully plan out the next three years of this project was done in December 2023. There are two components to this project - Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Water Quality Monitoring. YRDFA will be hiring two (2) technicians to work alongside our Environmental Specialist and Anthropologist and work throughout the Yukon River Drainage.

Subsistence Assistants (ADF&G funded)

The Subsistence Assistants program is a partnership between YRDFA and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. This program helps survey communities and community members who fish during the summer during post-season to get a comprehensive report of the fishing season on the Yukon River. The in-person surveying will begin in Emmonak on September 4 and will move upriver through communities throughout September and October. The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association coordinated the partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to hire local community surveyors to connect with the community, find households to survey, support with transportation, and inform of any community events that may overlap. An end of season report will be crafted following the end of the surveying period.

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

- Alaska Federation of Natives in Anchorage - October 16-18, 2025
- Board of Fish Work Session in Anchorage - October 28-29, 2025
- AYK Region Board of Fish in Fairbanks - November 18-22, 2025
- Yukon River Panel - TBD in Canada - January 24-29, 2026
- Board of Fish Aleutian/Chignik/Area M in Anchorage - February 18-24, 2026
- Marine Resource Education Program Training in Juneau - February 23-27, 2026