

FCR27-01 Executive Summary	
General Description	FCR27-01 reviews the closure to the harvest of salmon in a portion of the Kanuti River drainage by federally qualified subsistence users.
Current Regulation	§___.27(e)(3) Yukon-Northern Area *** <i>(ix) You may not subsistence fish for salmon in the following drainages located north of the main Yukon River:</i> <i>(A) Kanuti River upstream from a point 5 miles downstream of the State highway crossing;</i> *** ***
OSM Preliminary Conclusion	Rescind the Closure
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	
Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	
Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	
Interagency Staff Committee Comments	

FCR27-01 Executive Summary	
ADF&G Comments	
Written Public Comments	None

DRAFT FEDERAL FISHERIES CLOSURE REVIEW

FCR27-01

Issue

Fisheries Closure Review FCR27-01 is a Federal Subsistence Board (Board) directed review of a Federal subsistence fishery closure to the harvest of salmon in the Kanuti River drainage upstream from a point five miles downstream of the State highway crossing (hereafter Kanuti River drainage; **Figure 1**). It is the Board's policy to review existing closures every four years so that Federal public lands and waters can be reopened when the closures are no longer necessary. The purpose of this closure review is to determine if the closure is still warranted and to ensure the closure does not remain in place longer than needed.

Closure Location and Species: Yukon River drainage (District 4A), Kanuti River drainage—salmon

Closure Dates: Year-round

Current Federal Regulation

§___.27(e)(3) Yukon-Northern Area

(ix) You may not subsistence fish for salmon in the following drainages located north of the main Yukon River:

(A) Kanuti River upstream from a point 5 miles downstream of the State highway crossing;

Relevant Federal Regulations

§___.27(b) Subsistence Taking of Fish

(4) Except as otherwise provided for in this section, you may not obstruct more than one-half the width of any stream with any gear used to take fish for subsistence uses.

(16) Unless specified otherwise in this section, you may use a rod and reel to take fish without a subsistence fishing permit. Harvest limits applicable to the use of a rod and reel to take fish for subsistence uses shall be as follows:

(ii) Except as otherwise provided for in this section, if you are not required to obtain a subsistence fishing permit for an area, the harvest and possession limits for taking fish for subsistence uses with a rod and reel are the same as for taking fish under State of Alaska subsistence fishing regulations in those same areas. If the State does not have a specific subsistence season and/or harvest limit for that particular species, the limit shall be the same as for taking fish under State of Alaska sport fishing regulations.

§ __.27(e)(3) Yukon-Northern Area

(i) Unless otherwise restricted in this section, you may take fish in the Yukon-Northern Area at any time. ... You may subsistence fish for salmon with rod and reel in the Yukon River drainage 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, unless rod and reel are specifically otherwise restricted in this paragraph (e)(3).

(ii) For the Yukon River drainage, 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 [emergency orders]), unless superseded by a Federal special action.

(viii) In Subdistrict 4A after the opening of the State commercial salmon fishing season, you may not take salmon for subsistence for 12 hours immediately before, during, and for 12 hours after each State commercial salmon fishing period; however, you may take Chinook salmon during the State commercial fishing season, with drift gillnet gear only, from 6:00 p.m. Sunday until 6:00 p.m. Tuesday and from 6:00 p.m. Wednesday until 6:00 p.m. Friday.

(xi) You may take salmon only by gillnet, beach seine, dip net, fish wheel, or rod and reel, subject to the restrictions set forth in this section.

(xv) Unless otherwise specified in this section, you may take fish other than salmon by set gillnet, drift gillnet, beach seine, fish wheel, long line, fyke net, dip net, jigging gear, spear,

lead, or rod and reel, subject to the following restrictions, which also apply to subsistence salmon fishing:

(H) In the Bonanza Creek drainage and a portion of the Kanuti River drainage (upstream from a point 5 miles downstream of the State highway crossing), you may harvest fish other than salmon with rod and reel only; the grayling harvest and possession limit is 10 per day.

Current State Regulations

Yukon Area—Subsistence

5 AAC 01.225. Waters closed to subsistence fishing

(b) The following drainages located north of the mainstem Yukon River are closed to subsistence fishing:

(1) Kanuti River upstream from a point five miles downstream of the state highway crossing;

Yukon River Area—Sport

5 AAC 73.010. Seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Yukon River Area

(a) Except as otherwise specified in this section or through an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060, sport fishing is permitted year round in the waters of the Yukon River Area.

(b) Except as otherwise specified in (c) of this section, the following are the general bag, possession, and size limits for finfish and shellfish in the waters of the Yukon River Area:

(1) king salmon 20 inches or greater in length: the bag and possession limit is three fish, of which only two fish may be 28 inches or greater in length;

(2) salmon, other than king salmon: the bag and possession limit is 10 fish, with no size limit;

(c) The following are the exceptions to the general bag, possession, and size limits, and fishing seasons specified in (a) of this section for the Yukon River Area:

(4) in the Dalton Highway corridor (Trans-Alaska Pipeline corridor) within the Yukon River Area, which is described as a corridor five miles wide on each side of the Dalton Highway north of the Yukon River, excluding the Ray River,

(A) sport fishing for salmon is closed;

Regulatory Year Initiated: 1992

Extent of Federal Public Lands/Waters

For purposes of this analysis, the phrase “Federal public waters” is defined as those waters described under 36 CFR §242.3 and 43 CFR §51.3. All the Federal public waters of the Kanuti River drainage as described in this closure review (Federal public waters upstream from a point five miles downstream [in river miles] of the State highway crossing), are on general domain land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM; **Figure 1**). On general domain lands, Federal subsistence regulations apply only to non-navigable waters. No navigability determinations have been made for the section of the drainage located on BLM general domain lands.

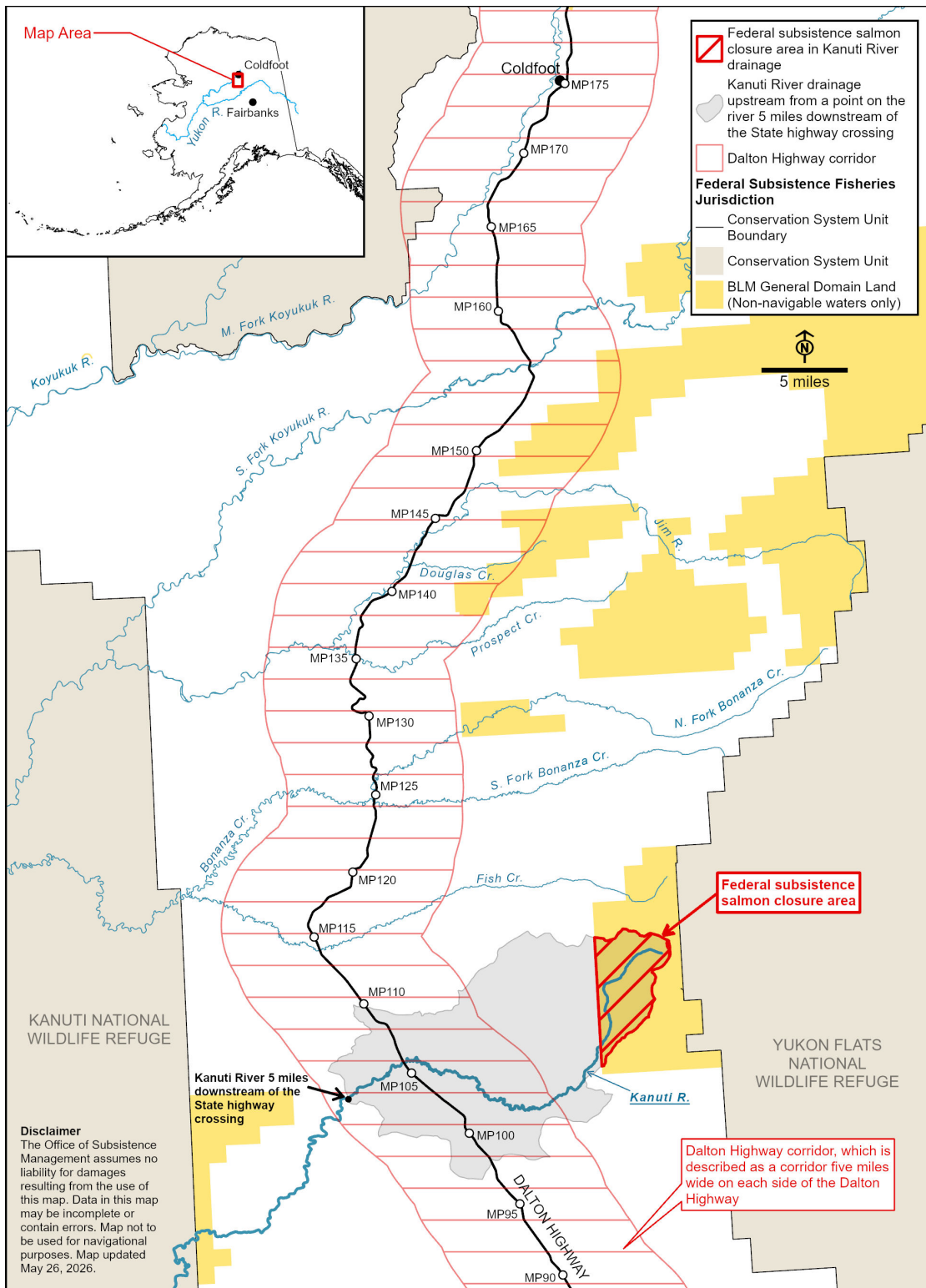


Figure 1. Map of the Kanuti River drainage and the portion of the drainage closed to Federal subsistence fishing for salmon.

Current Events

Some of the Federal public lands in the drainage were recently selected by the State of Alaska and no longer qualify for Federal rural subsistence priority. Public Land Order (PLO) 7966 was published in the Federal Register on February 25, 2026. This PLO revoked PLO No. 5150 and 5180 within the Dalton Utility Corridor from approximately Dalton Highway mile post 56 to mile post 300, pursuant to Executive Order 14153 and Secretary's Order 3422. Revocation of PLO No. 5150 and 5180 within the Dalton Utility Corridor opened the area to selection by the State of Alaska under the Alaska Statehood Act. This revocation allowed approximately 2,066,000 acres of "top filed" land to become effective State selections. The selected lands no longer meet the definition of public lands under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA); as a result, they do not qualify for Federal rural subsistence priority. The remaining 61,845 acres within the Dalton Utility Corridor, which have not been top filed by the State, continue to be open for Federal rural subsistence priority (U.S. DOI 2026; **Figures 1 & 2**).

Regulatory History

Under State regulations, the portion of the Kanuti River within the Dalton Highway corridor (five miles on either side of the highway) has been closed to subsistence fishing since the late 1970s, beginning with construction of the Dalton Highway (Holen et al. 2012). A formal amendment to State regulation 5 AAC 01.255 was recorded in Register 102 on May 31, 1987, and the codified regulation now, and through later amendments (e.g., am 7/26/90, Register 115; am 7/16/92, Register 123) identifies "Kanuti River drainage upstream from a point five miles downstream of the state highway crossing" explicitly, extending the closure beyond the Dalton Highway corridor. The opening of the Dalton Highway to public travel in 1994 provided new access to lakes and streams along the route. Increases in recreational fishing effort and harvest resulted in a salmon fishing closure within the Dalton Highway corridor (Stubby 2021).

In 1992, the Federal Subsistence Management Program promulgated regulations governing the harvest of fish for subsistence uses in non-navigable waters within and adjacent to Federal public lands (57 Fed. Reg. 22940 [May 29, 1992]). These regulations incorporated many provisions from State of Alaska subsistence fishing regulations, including the subsistence fishing closure in the Kanuti River drainage.

In 1999, the Board also adopted Federal regulations for fish in navigable waters within and adjacent to Federal public lands where there is a Federal reserved water right (64 Fed. Reg. 1276 [January 8, 1999]). These regulations do not apply on navigable waters within and adjacent to BLM general domain lands (43 CFR 51.3).

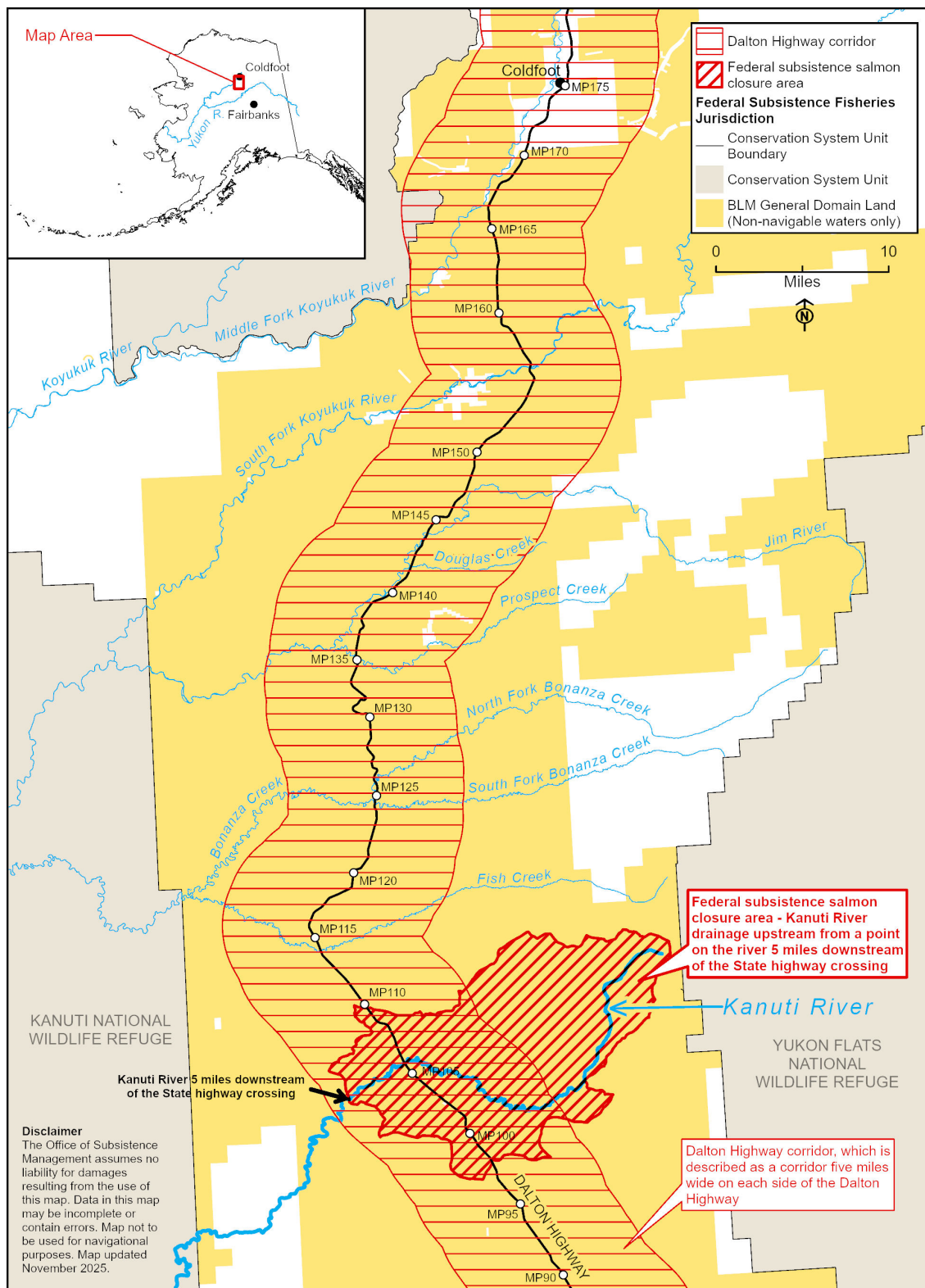


Figure 2. Map showing the Federal closure area in the Kanuti River drainage before lands were selected by the State as described in the Current Events section.

The Federal subsistence fishing closures for the Kanuti River were reviewed by the Board during the 2023–2025 Fisheries Regulatory Cycle (FCR23-02). The Western Interior Alaska, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils (Western Interior, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and Eastern Interior Councils) recommended rescinding the closures to nonsalmon species only to support subsistence harvest opportunity while also protecting salmon. The North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (North Slope Council) recommended rescinding the closures to all species to benefit subsistence uses and provide a Federal subsistence priority in the area. The Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council took no action because the closures were outside their region. The Board voted to rescind the closure to nonsalmon species only due to current conservation concerns for salmon.

For the 2025–2027 fisheries cycle, the Western Interior Council submitted Fisheries Proposal FP25-16, which requested the Board modify regulations in the Bonanza Creek drainage and a portion of the Kanuti River drainage to allow rod and reel gear only and an Arctic Grayling harvest and possession limit of 10 per day. The Western Interior, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and Eastern Interior Councils supported the proposal. The North Slope Council took no action and deferred to the home region. The Board adopted FP25-16 in deference to the Councils (43 CFR 51.27(e)(3)(xv)(H)).

Closure Last Reviewed: 2023—FCR23-02

Justification for Original Closure

This closure was adopted into Federal regulations from State regulations in 1992 to minimize disruption to the State’s continuing fish and game management, because of the uncertainty over the resumption of State management of subsistence, yet still fulfill the requirements of Title VIII of ANILCA (55 FR 27114 [June 29, 1990]).

Council Recommendation for Original Closure

N/A

State Recommendation for Original Closure

N/A

Customary and Traditional Use Determination

Residents of the Yukon River drainage Districts 1–6 and the communities of Chevak, Hooper Bay, Scammon Bay, and Stebbins have a customary and traditional use determination for salmon in the Yukon River drainage.

Biological Background

Chinook and Chum salmon in the Yukon River drainage have been in a period of prolonged decline, resulting in historically low abundance levels and significant conservation concerns. In recent years,

returns have been insufficient to meet most escapement goals in the drainage. As a result, fisheries have been severely restricted or closed to prioritize rebuilding salmon populations and ensure enough fish reach their spawning grounds. Although annual run strength varies over time, recent returns indicate that both Chinook and Chum salmon remain well below long-term average levels and are unlikely to support historical harvest levels until stock productivity improves and escapement goals are consistently met (**Figures 3–5**).

Chinook and summer Chum salmon are present in the Kanuti River, downstream of the closure area (Trainor et al. 2019, ADF&G 2022a). However, few assessment projects have been conducted in the Kanuti River. Aerial surveys were flown in 1969, 1971, 1975, and 1985 (ADF&G 2022b). Chinook Salmon were only observed in 1985, and eight fish were counted (JTC 1985). Summer Chum Salmon were only observed in 1969, and 25 fish were counted (ADF&G 2022b).

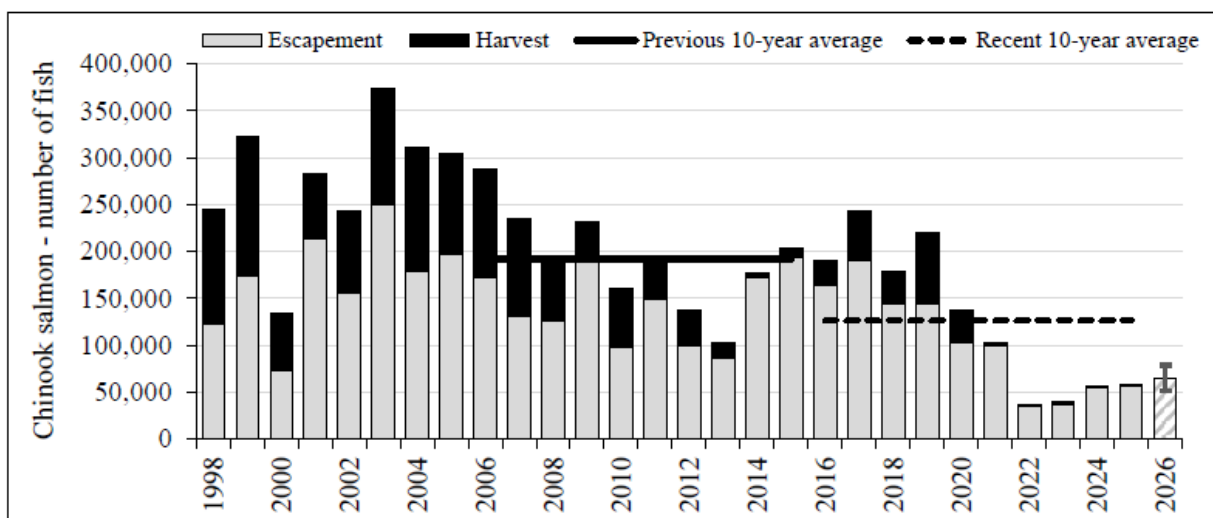


Figure 3. Yukon River Chinook Salmon total run. The dashed line is the recent 10-year average run size of ~126,500 Chinook Salmon and the solid line is the previous 10-year average of ~191,850 fish. The 2026 striped bar represents the approximate midpoint of the drainagewide outlook range (64,300 fish). At run sizes below 150,000 fish, escapement goals tend not to be met. Figure taken from ADF&G 2026a.

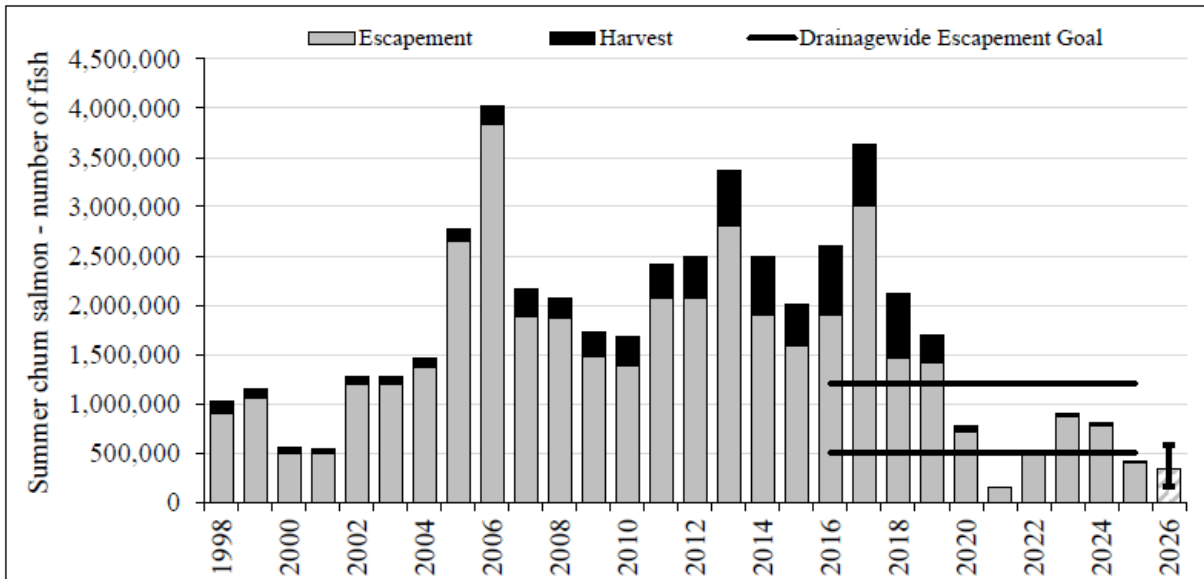


Figure 4. Yukon River summer Chum Salmon total run with drainagewide escapement goal range shown in the solid black lines. The 2026 striped bar represents the approximate midpoint of the outlook range (345,600 fish). Figure taken from ADF&G 2026a.

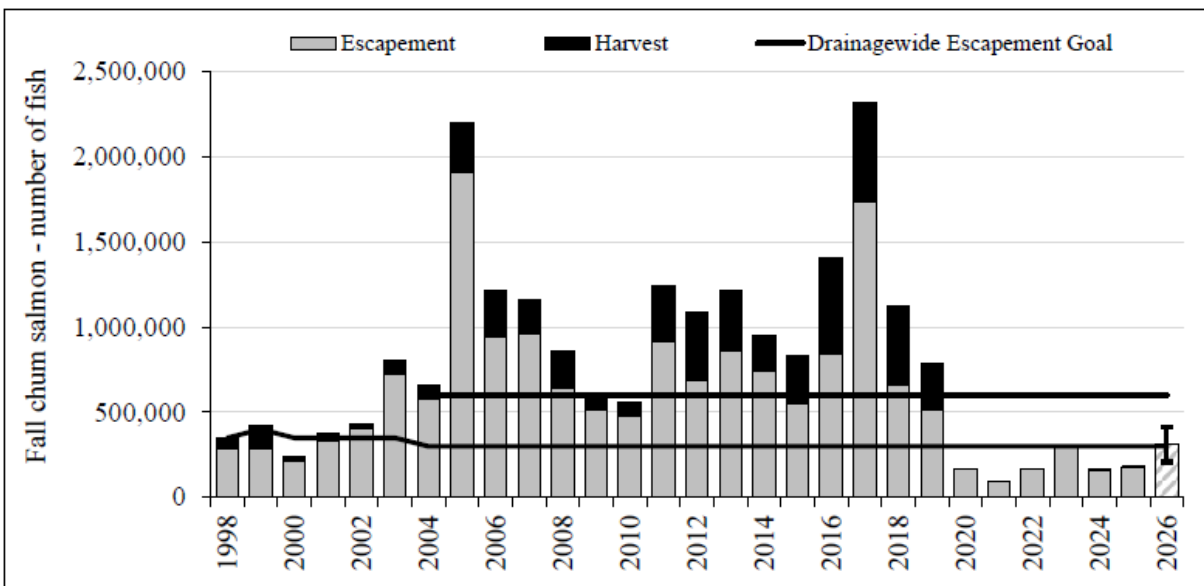


Figure 5. Yukon River fall Chum Salmon total run with drainagewide escapement goal ranges shown in the solid black lines. The 2026 striped bar represents the approximate midpoint of the outlook range (311,000 fish). Figure taken from ADF&G 2026a.

Cultural Knowledge and Traditional Practices

The area under consideration in this analysis is within the traditional boundaries of the Koyukon Athabascan people, an area which has been influenced by interaction with Iñupiat. Salmon have always been part of Koyukon and Iñupiat ways of life. Over millennia, both groups developed and

practice stewardship strategies (Indigenous/Traditional Knowledge), including harvest methods of fish and wildlife, that sustain their spiritual, cultural, and dietary needs (Nelson 1973, Nelson et al. 1978, Caulfield 1983). These strategies are dynamic and specifics may change but subsistence harvests continue to be adaptive and opportunistic; it is customary to harvest what is available. Two central aspects of the sustainability strategies practiced by the Koyukon and Iñupiat include sharing food with others and maintaining a respectful and reciprocal relationship with the fish and wildlife upon whom they depend.

Of those contemporary communities with a customary and traditional use determination for salmon in the Yukon River drainage, Wiseman and Coldfoot are located closest to the Dalton Highway where it crosses the Kanuti River. For this reason, these two communities may be the most likely to fish for salmon in the closed area. In addition to these communities, which are located on the road system, Evansville and Bettles are connected to the Dalton Highway via a winter road to Evansville from January through March (Holen et al. 2012). Salmon; however, are not in the river during this time. An Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Division of Subsistence survey indicated that residents of Bettles and Evansville focused their subsistence harvests in areas closer to home (Holen et al. 2012). The community of Stevens Village also has access to the Dalton Highway as it crosses the Yukon River, via boat and snowmachine (ADNR 2026: 3–29). However, a subsistence survey of Stevens Village conducted from 1984–1985 shows that residents focus most of their subsistence fishing activity closer to their community on the Yukon River (Sumida 1988). In 2014, ADF&G Division of Subsistence conducted household surveys of Stevens Village. The researchers found only four year-round households and did not document subsistence use areas for salmon (Brown et al. 2016: 194). Wiseman and Coldfoot are very small communities located on the Dalton Highway. Both communities were established as the result of the gold mining industry in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Coldfoot was abandoned by 1930, before being re-settled in the 1970s in connection with construction of the Dalton Highway and the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. As of 2024, the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development estimated that there were 27 residents in Coldfoot Census Designated Place (CDP) and four in Wiseman CDP (ADLWD 2024). However, at the winter 2026 meeting of the Western Interior Council, the Chair, who resides in Wiseman, advised the Office of Subsistence Management that these estimates do not reflect local understandings of residency. The Chair stated that Wiseman has a year-round population of 13, and while Coldfoot is more transitory and seasonal in nature than Wiseman, it does have a year-round population of about 10 residents (WIRAC 2026). The area also includes an unknown number of residents along the Dalton Highway corridor in camps and other isolated households.

ADF&G Division of Subsistence conducted its only subsistence survey of Wiseman and Coldfoot in 2012, for the 2011 calendar year.

At the time of ADF&G's survey, there were five year-round households in Wiseman, and all were surveyed. Four of these households attempted to fish, and all households used fish, although in small quantities (Holen et al. 2012). Residents of Wiseman and Coldfoot may harvest nonsalmon fish within the Kanuti River closure area with rod and reel under State sport fishing regulations.

Salmon

Wiseman residents traditionally harvested and used small amounts of Chum and Chinook salmon locally. However, in part because of local closures to both subsistence and sport fishing for salmon in place since 1978 (sport fishing for salmon is closed within five miles on each side of the Dalton Highway), Wiseman residents primarily harvest salmon at locations far afield, such as in the Copper and Yukon rivers (Holen et al. 2012).

During the 2011 study year, only one of the five Wiseman households fished for salmon (at locations distant from the community), resulting in an estimated 12 pounds of Sockeye Salmon per person, or 4% of Wiseman's total wild food harvest in weight. In addition, Wiseman households received and shared Chinook Salmon, although they did not directly harvest any. All households used salmon (Holen et al. 2012).

Harvest History

Subsistence fishing for salmon is prohibited in the Kanuti River drainage under State and Federal regulations so there is no legal subsistence harvest of salmon in this system. Subsistence harvest of nonsalmon fish has been allowed under Federal regulations since 2023.

Sport fishing for salmon is allowed in the Kanuti River drainage except the Dalton Highway corridor. Special State of Alaska sport fish regulations apply to all streams within the Dalton Highway corridor, excluding the Ray River. This corridor includes the stretch of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline north of the Yukon River and the land within five miles on each side of the Dalton Highway. Within this corridor sport fishing for salmon is closed. The Federal closure area is outside the Dalton Highway corridor.

During years when sport fishing for salmon in the Yukon River drainage is not closed or restricted by State emergency order or Federal special action, Chinook Salmon can be harvested outside of the Dalton Highway corridor with a limit of three per day, three in possession over 20 inches (only two can be over 28 inches), and 10 per day, 10 in possession for under 20 inches. Other salmon have a 10 per day, 10 in possession limit.

Sport fish effort and harvest of salmon are likely low in the drainage. Sport fish harvest data for the Yukon Management Area show a 10-year average (2014–2023) harvest of 2 Chinook Salmon and 285 Chum Salmon. The 5-year average (2019–2023) is slightly higher at 4 Chinook Salmon and 344 Chum Salmon. Actual harvest in the Kanuti River is likely much lower because these numbers represent the entire Yukon Management Area, not the Kanuti River alone.

The ADF&G issued emergency orders closing Chinook Salmon sport fishing in the Yukon Management Area during every year 2014–2026, except for limited opportunities in 2017 and 2019 (Stuby 2025, ADF&G 2026b). Chum Salmon sport fishing had more opportunities, with harvest allowed 2014–2019 and part of 2026 (Stuby 2025, ADF&G 2026c).

Alternatives Considered

One alternative is to retain the status quo, which would keep the Federal salmon subsistence closure in place. Under this alternative, there would not be an opportunity to harvest salmon under Federal regulations and there would not be a Federal subsistence priority for salmon. However, federally qualified subsistence users could still harvest salmon under State sport fish regulations outside of the Dalton Highway corridor unless restricted by State emergency order or Federal special action.

Retaining the closure would protect stocks in an area where population levels are unknown. The closure prevents efficient gear like gillnets, which can catch large numbers of fish. However, given the difficulty of accessing the Federal closure area and transporting large gear there, it is unlikely that gillnets would be used to harvest salmon. While salmon populations may be protected by limiting subsistence harvest to certain gear types (for example, rod and reel only) and/or establishing harvest limits, these modifications are not possible through the closure review process and would require a fisheries regulatory proposal.

Another alternative is to modify the closure by closing the harvest of salmon to all users. This would fully protect salmon populations in the closure area. Under this alternative, there would be no subsistence or sport fishing opportunity for salmon in Federal public waters. Closing to all users would eliminate the current situation, in which Federal public waters are closed to subsistence salmon fishing while remaining open to sport fishing under State regulations. However, this alternative would be an unnecessary restriction on non-subsistence uses as sport fish harvest data and recent sport fish closures for salmon suggest the sport fishery does not present a conservation concern. In addition, subsistence surveys indicate subsistence users may harvest a portion of their wild foods under State sport fish regulations.

Effects

Rescinding the closure would give federally qualified subsistence users a priority harvest opportunity for salmon in the Kanuti River drainage, including the area that is currently open to State regulated sport fishing. However, the Federal closure area is small, which could make it difficult to differentiate between State and Federal lands and lead to user confusion. Additionally, opening the Federal closure area without harvest limits for gear types beyond rod and reel could increase the risk of overharvest. Protective measures, such as restricting subsistence harvest to rod and reel or establishing harvest limits, cannot be implemented through the closure review and would require a separate fisheries proposal, though the Federal in-season manager could apply harvest and gear restrictions if needed to protect populations. Given the small closure area, which is difficult to access, and the Federal in-season manager's ability to apply restrictions if needed, rescinding the closure is unlikely to cause conservation concerns.

Retaining the status quo would keep the salmon subsistence closure in the Kanuti River drainage in place. Keeping the closure in place will help protect stocks in an area where population levels are unknown and prohibit gear capable of capturing large numbers of fish. Federally qualified subsistence users could still harvest salmon under State sport fish regulations outside of the Dalton Highway

corridor using rod and reel unless restricted by State emergency order or Federal special action. However, there would not be a Federal subsistence priority for salmon in the area.

OSM PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

- ☐ Retain the Status Quo
- ☒ Rescind the Closure
- ☐ Modify the Closure
- ☐ Defer Decision on the Closure or Take No Action

The draft regulations read:

§___.27(e)(3) Yukon-Northern Area

(ix) You may not subsistence fish for salmon in the following drainages located north of the main Yukon River:

~~(A) Kanuti River upstream from a point 5 miles downstream of the State highway crossing;~~

Justification

Rescinding the closure would establish a Federal subsistence priority for salmon in an area that is currently closed to subsistence fishing but open to other uses. Section 802(2) of ANILCA requires that subsistence uses by rural residents of Alaska “shall be the priority consumptive uses of all such resources on the public lands of Alaska.” Federal subsistence opportunity for salmon should be provided in the Kanuti River drainage to comply with the rural priority mandated by ANILCA.

The recent selection of land around the Dalton Highway corridor through the revocation of PLOs 5150 and 5180 has changed the status of most of the area previously included in this closure, particularly those areas easily accessible from the highway. The remaining portion of this closure is at the extreme headwaters of the drainage and is difficult to access. As such, rescinding the closure is unlikely to cause conservation concerns because effort will likely be low. Additionally, the Federal in-season manager can use their delegated authority to protect populations by restricting gear types and/or harvest limits, limiting harvest to federally qualified subsistence users only, or closing to all users if warranted.

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