



2026 Preliminary Yukon River Salmon Fisheries Review

Supplemental handout from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Yukon Team
For the Fall Regional Advisory Council Meetings
Updated October 23, 2026

This summary is preliminary, as abundance estimates may change post-season. Salmon data are still being assessed at the time of submission and should be considered incomplete. This report was compiled by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). In this report, we compare 2026 salmon run performance with preseason forecasts and historical medians.

Before the 2026 salmon seasons, Yukon River salmon outlooks and management strategies were discussed at a Federal public hearing; meetings of the Eastern Interior, Western Interior, and Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Advisory Councils; the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) preseason meeting; the Yukon River Panel meeting; and the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission annual meeting. The Federal manager offered formal Government-to-Government Tribal Consultation meetings with Yukon River drainage Tribal Governments upon request. The Federal fishery outlook and management strategy were sent to all Yukon Tribal and City governments, and copies of the Preseason Outlook flier were mailed to Yukon River fishing households.

2026 Summer Season

Chinook Salmon

The preseason drainage-wide outlook for Chinook salmon was for a run of 52,000 to 79,000 fish, with 22,000 to 33,000 expected to be Canadian-origin. Both outlooks were well below historical medians. No escapement goals were expected to be met and complete closures were anticipated.

The sonar project operated near Pilot Station estimated a passage of approximately 104,000 Chinook salmon in 2026 (Figure 1). The drainage-wide spawning escapement estimate will be finalized postseason, but none of the established Chinook salmon escapement goals were met in the entire Yukon River drainage. Based on postseason genetic mixed stock analysis, an estimated 61,000 (+/- 10,000) of the Chinook salmon counted by the Pilot Station sonar project were Canadian-origin. The sonar project operated near Eagle estimated a passage of approximately 35,500 Chinook salmon, which was well below the rebuilding target of 71,000 Chinook salmon and also below the expected number crossing the Canada border based on genetics from Pilot Station sonar (Figure 2).

This year represents the highest Chinook salmon escapement in Canada since 2019. Postseason genetic analysis at Pilot Station sonar estimated an above-average proportion of Canadian-origin

Chinook salmon passage at 59%, compared to the historical average of 42%. These results, combined with another year of complete Chinook salmon harvest closures and an apparent discrepancy between Pilot Station and Eagle sonar counts, suggest high natural mortality within the Yukon River may have occurred. Preliminary results from tissue samples collected at Pilot Station sonar also show a high proportion of *Ichthyophonus* infection in returning Chinook salmon, with approximately 40% being infected. Harvest estimates will be used in combination with sonar estimates to calculate the observed discrepancy between Pilot Station and Eagle sonar counts for Canadian-origin Chinook salmon.

Summer Chum Salmon

The preseason summer chum salmon outlook was 160,000 to 580,000 fish. Uncertainty about run strength and low returns from parent years prompted a cautious management approach, and the season began closed to harvest.

Through July 18, Pilot Station sonar estimated slightly more than 1 million chum salmon (Figure 3). This estimate was the largest summer chum salmon run observed since 2019, above the preseason forecast and within the drainage-wide escapement goal range of 500,000 to 1.2 million fish. However, the Anvik River escapement goal of 350,000 to 700,000 chum salmon was not met.

The summer chum salmon run was much better than expected in part due to an above-average component of 4-year-old fish. The summer chum salmon run reconstruction model will be available this winter to account for drainage-wide harvest and escapement below Pilot Station sonar. When the surplus was projected, subsistence harvest opportunities were provided with selective gear types, but required the live release of Chinook salmon. Fishing opportunities for summer chum salmon ended three days prior to the start of the fall season in each district due to the low outlook for fall chum salmon. The summer chum salmon harvest opportunities were limited to federally qualified subsistence users in federal public waters of the Yukon River drainage to ensure subsistence priority in a year with strict subsistence harvest restrictions and closures.

Preliminary Chinook and Summer Chum Escapement Counts

The preliminary escapement counts for Chinook and summer chum salmon are:

Chinook

- Anvik River aerial (ADF&G): 372 (historical average: 1,000)
- Nulato River aerial (ADF&G): 347 (historical average: 1,196)
- Gisasa River aerial (ADF&G): 199 (historical average: 689)
- Chena River tower (ADF&G): 1,546 (historical average: 4,711)
- Salcha River tower (ADF&G): 1,976 (historical average: 7,095)

Summer Chum

- Anvik River sonar (ADF&G): 259,194 (historical median: 440,968)
- Nulato River aerial (ADF&G): 4,408 (historical median: 7,529)
- Gisasa River aerial (ADF&G): 2,341 (historical median: 9,152)
- Chena River tower (ADF&G): 5,876 (historical median: 6,883)
- Salcha River tower (ADF&G): 13,207 (historical median: 20,516)

2026 Fall Season

Fall Chum Salmon

The fall chum salmon preseason outlook was 209,000 to 415,000 fish. Based on low returns in recent years, management began with a conservative approach at the start of the fall season. Estimates from Pilot Station sonar during the transition between seasons include a mix of summer chum and fall chum salmon. Between July 19 and September 7, during the fall season, slightly more than 1 million chum salmon passed Pilot Station sonar (Figure 4).

The fall chum salmon run was also better than expected because of an above-average component of 4-year-old fish. Based on in-season genetics collected at Pilot Station sonar after July 18, the fall chum salmon run was estimated at 913,000 fish (Figure 5). This was the largest overall passage since 2017, a year with one of the largest fall chum salmon runs on record.

At Pilot Station sonar, based on mixed stock genetic analysis, fall chum salmon passage was comprised of 54% Tanana River stocks, 30% Border U.S. stocks (Teedriinjik, Sheenjek, Draanjik, and Coleen rivers), 15% Canadian stocks (including 12% mainstem Yukon River-bound fish and 3% Canada Porcupine-bound fish).

The fall chum salmon run is likely to meet all escapement goals within Alaska. The Upper U.S. tributary goal at the Teedriinjik sonar (85,000–234,000) was achieved. The Delta River goal (7,000–20,000) within the Tanana River drainage is also expected to be met, although the data will not be available until foot surveys are completed by ADF&G. Surveys usually peak in mid-November, and final estimates are typically available the first week of December.

The proportion of Canadian-origin fall chum salmon passage was 15%, slightly higher than in recent years at Pilot Station sonar, but well below the historical average of 30%. Current escapement-based projections of fall chum salmon headed to Canada indicate that the Canadian-origin escapement goals will likely not be met. The treaty objective (interim management escapement goal) for the mainstem Yukon River is 70,000–104,000 fall chum salmon and the treaty objective for the Fishing Branch River is 22,000–49,000 fall chum salmon.

Although the fall chum salmon run appeared strong, and escapement goals were met in Alaska, the Canadian component of the run remained poor. Subsistence fishing opportunities were allowed in Alaskan tributaries of the Yukon River drainage, but closures in the mainstem remained in effect for most of the season. In areas without passage of Canadian-origin chum salmon, opportunities to utilize 6-inch gillnets to harvest fall chum and coho salmon were limited to federally qualified subsistence users in federal public waters. This was done to ensure subsistence priority until fishing restrictions were rescinded near the end of the salmon runs.

Preliminary Fall Chum Escapement Counts

The preliminary escapement counts for fall chum salmon are:

- Teedriinjik River sonar (USFWS): 261,496 (historical median: 171,742).
- Sheenjek River sonar (ADF&G): 31,767 (historical median to date: 61,527). The Sheenjek estimate for 2026 is considered a minimum.
- Fishing Branch weir/sonar (DFO): No count due to high water.

- Upper Porcupine River sonar (DFO/VGN) through October 5: 23,150 (historical median to date: 23,223). Daily counts are still being processed. The relationship between Upper Porcupine sonar passage and Fishing Branch River passage will be used to assess the escapement goal.
- Eagle sonar (ADF&G/DFO): 65,091 (Figure 6; historical median: 143,089). The count includes a post-season expansion representing estimated passage after the project ends.

Coho Salmon

The coho salmon run was late and below average but was similar in size to the 2025 run. The estimated coho salmon run size, based on Pilot Station sonar passage, was approximately 102,000 fish (Figure 7). The coho run could support the subsistence harvest that was provided.

Management Actions

Due to preseason outlooks for low salmon run abundance, the Federal manager issued Federal special actions to close Federal public waters of the Yukon River drainage to the harvest of Chinook, chum, and coho salmon. The Federal Fisheries Manager determined subsistence fishing schedules, openings, closures, and methods in Federal public waters in collaboration with Alaska Department of Fish and Game managers.

Before the typical arrival of Chinook, chum, and coho salmon, harvest closures were implemented in Federal waters for all users. When salmon fishing opportunities were provided, fishing was limited to federally qualified subsistence users in Federal public waters to provide for subsistence priority. Complete salmon closures in the Yukon River mainstem remained in place for most of the season. Restrictions were lifted in early September in the lower river and early October in the upper river, after the bulk of Canadian-origin fall chum salmon had passed through each fishing district. In some tributaries within the Yukon River drainage in Alaska, salmon harvest was allowed earlier in the fall season.

Once restrictions were removed, subsistence fishing was open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, using 7.5-inch or smaller mesh gillnets and all other legal subsistence gear. The Porcupine River mainstem will remain closed through December 31. Mainstem subsistence salmon fishing opportunities were provided late in the fall season for lower river communities, when in-river passage represented only a fraction of the total salmon run. However, slightly more than 100,000 fall chum salmon, mostly bound for the Tanana River drainage, may have been passing by communities when restrictions were lifted.

Throughout the season, opportunities to harvest nonsalmon species using selective gear types remained available. The use of gillnets with 4-inch or smaller mesh was restricted to reduce the incidental harvest of salmon, while other selective gear types remained open 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. In addition, 2026 was the second year that gillnets with 6-inch mesh were allowed in select areas during the fall season to increase nonsalmon harvest opportunities.

Overall, Chinook salmon subsistence fishing remained closed, and chum salmon subsistence fishing was partially closed throughout both seasons. These restrictions marked the seventh consecutive year of severe chum salmon restrictions with gear limitations and the sixth consecutive year of complete Chinook salmon closures. Subsistence harvest estimates will

become available after ADF&G completes household surveys, fishing permits are returned from required areas and the data are analyzed.

Although there were limited opportunities for subsistence fishing, households faced another year of harvest levels well below their subsistence needs. These closures and gear restrictions imposed severe hardship on subsistence households, including impacts on community food security and cultural practices. Although Yukon residents valued the limited salmon and nonsalmon opportunities, those opportunities did not adequately address the subsistence, cultural, and spiritual needs of Yukon River communities dependent on salmon. The management actions taken were necessary to protect weaker stocks and try to achieve escapement goals but resulted in another year of substantial restrictions on subsistence salmon fishing.

Tribal Consultation, Public Outreach, and Meetings

In the spring of 2026, USFWS offered formal Tribal Consultations by request. While only one teleconference consultation meeting occurred with Hooper and Scammon Bay, preseason management strategies were shared with Tribes, and a public hearing on those strategies generated productive discussion and feedback. USFWS welcomes one-on-one Tribal Consultations with interested Tribal Governments and Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act corporations. Management staff were invited to the Nenana and Ruby Cultural Education camps which was an honor to participate and spend time with these communities.

During the salmon seasons, Federal special actions were coordinated with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Office of Subsistence Management. All salmon harvest closures, gear restrictions, and schedules announced in Federal waters matched those in State waters. When in-season salmon harvest opportunities were provided, they were limited to federally qualified subsistence users of the Yukon River drainage in Federal public waters. All Federal actions and restrictions were lifted at the end of the fall season.

The YRDFA in-season teleconferences, which bring people together from all parts of the Yukon River drainage, provided assessment and management updates as well as relayed important on the ground public feedback. Prenotice for all 34 Federal Special Actions related to Yukon River salmon was provided to the Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Chairs for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Eastern Interior, Western Interior, and Seward Peninsula Regional Advisory Councils, as well as to the Chair and Executive Director of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

If you were not receiving updates this year or wish to provide feedback, please contact us:

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The 2026 preliminary estimates charted below are not directly comparable to escapement goals as those estimates will be reconstructed post season using various methods that consider escapement, genetic analysis, and harvests. For final published estimates, see the Joint Technical Committee (JTC) annual report, which is published each spring. All estimates for 2026 are preliminary.

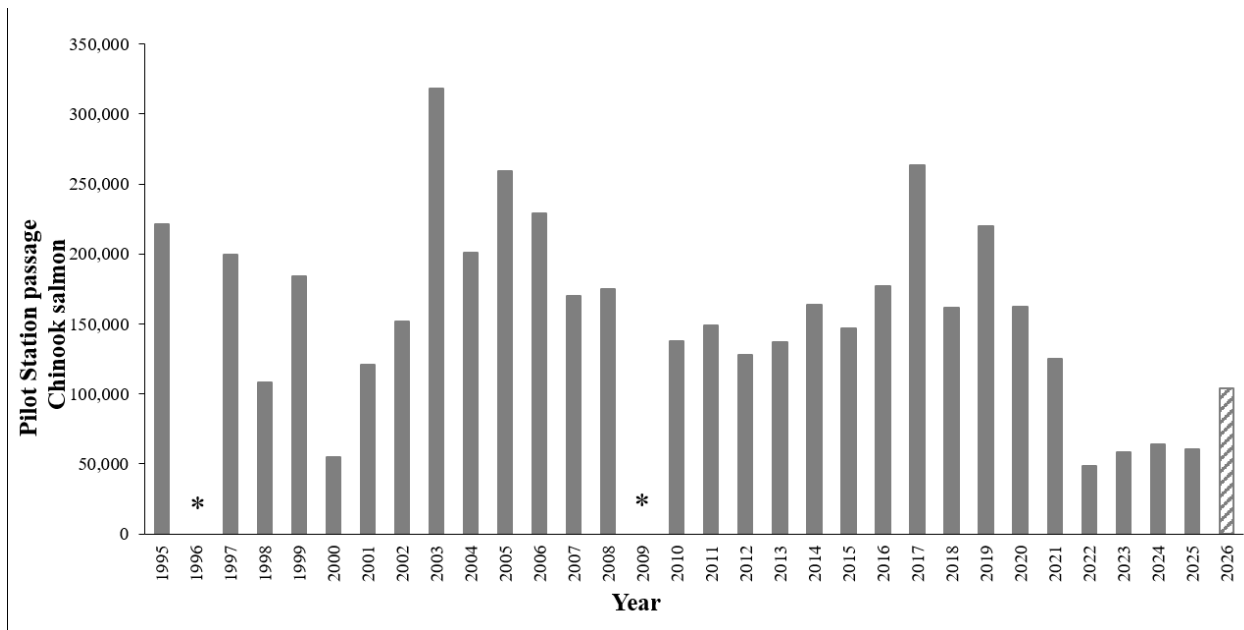


Figure 1. Cumulative passage of Chinook salmon at Pilot Station sonar from 1995 through 2026 (1995–2025, JTC Report, Appendix A1, 2026, excluding 1996 and 2009). The preliminary estimate for 2026 is the count at Pilot Station sonar. There is no drainage-wide escapement goal for Chinook salmon. However, runs near and lower than 150,000 Chinook historically failed to meet established escapement goals.

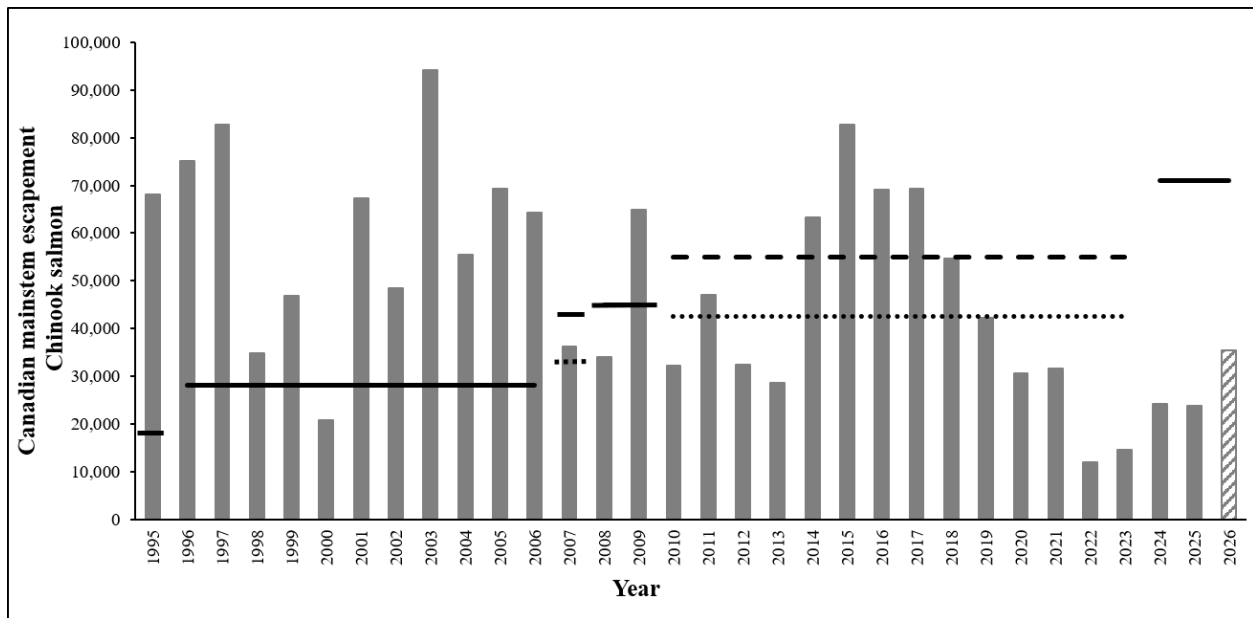


Figure 2. Estimated spawning escapement for Canadian-origin Yukon River mainstem Chinook salmon, derived from an integrated drainage-wide run reconstruction model (1995–2025, JTC Report, Appendix B11, 2026). The preliminary estimate for 2026 is the count at Eagle sonar and will be updated using the model. Dashed and solid lines indicate the border passage target or range for each year, including the current rebuilding target of 71,000.

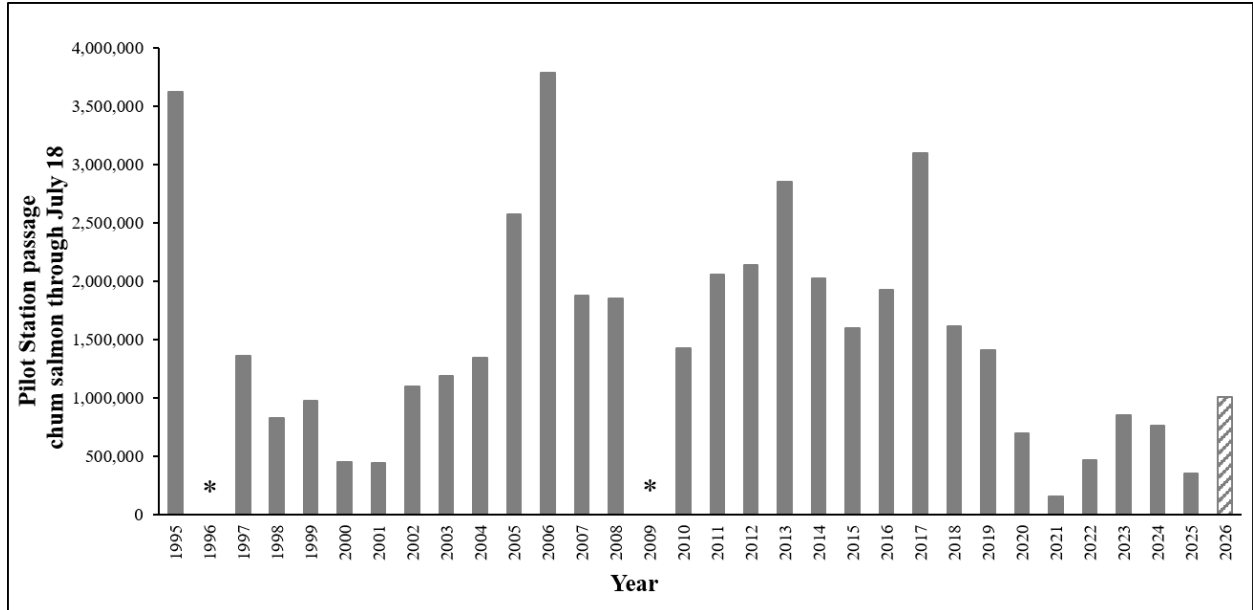


Figure 3. Cumulative passage of chum salmon (both stocks) at Pilot Station sonar during summer season (through July 18) from 1995 through 2026 (1995–2025, JTC Report, Appendix A1, 2026, excluding 1996 and 2009). The preliminary estimate for 2026 is the count at Pilot Station sonar. Not included in the figure is the summer chum salmon drainage-wide escapement goal of 500,000 to 1.2 million fish, as estimates of genetic mixed-stock analysis, harvest, and escapement are not accounted for in these passage estimates.

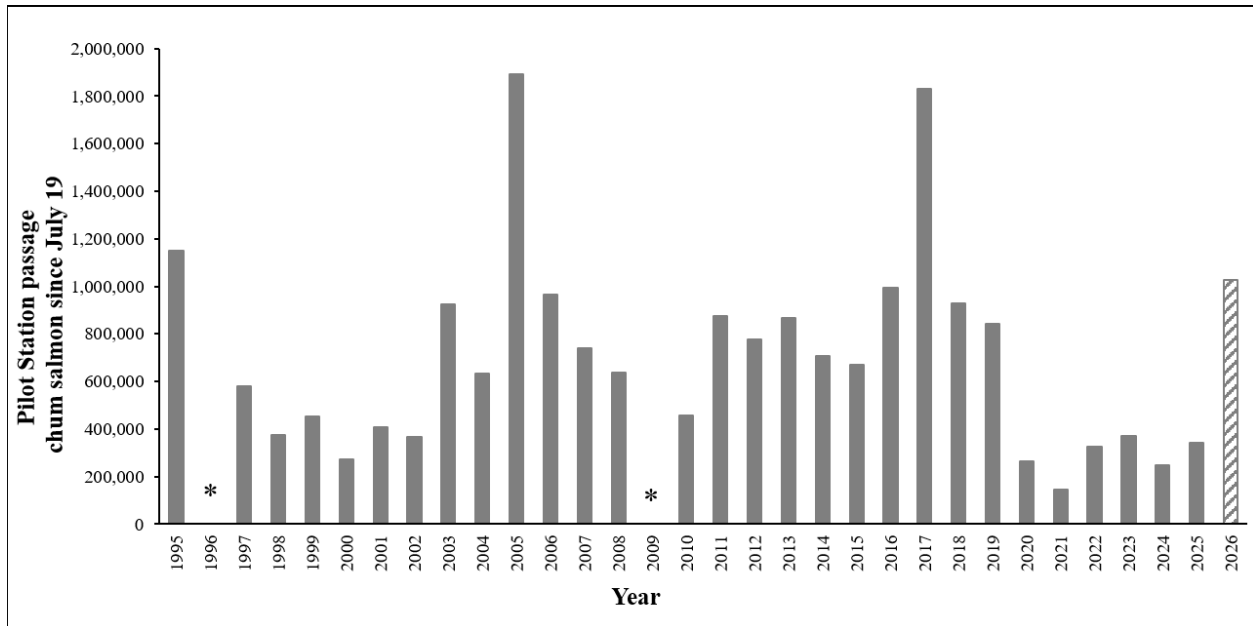


Figure 4. Cumulative passage during fall season (since July 19) at Pilot Station sonar from 1995 through 2026 (1995–2025, JTC Report, Appendix A1, 2026, excluding 1996 and 2009). The preliminary estimate for 2026 is the count at Pilot Station sonar. The counts in this figure include a mix of both summer and fall chum salmon. Harvest and escapement are not accounted for in these passage estimates.

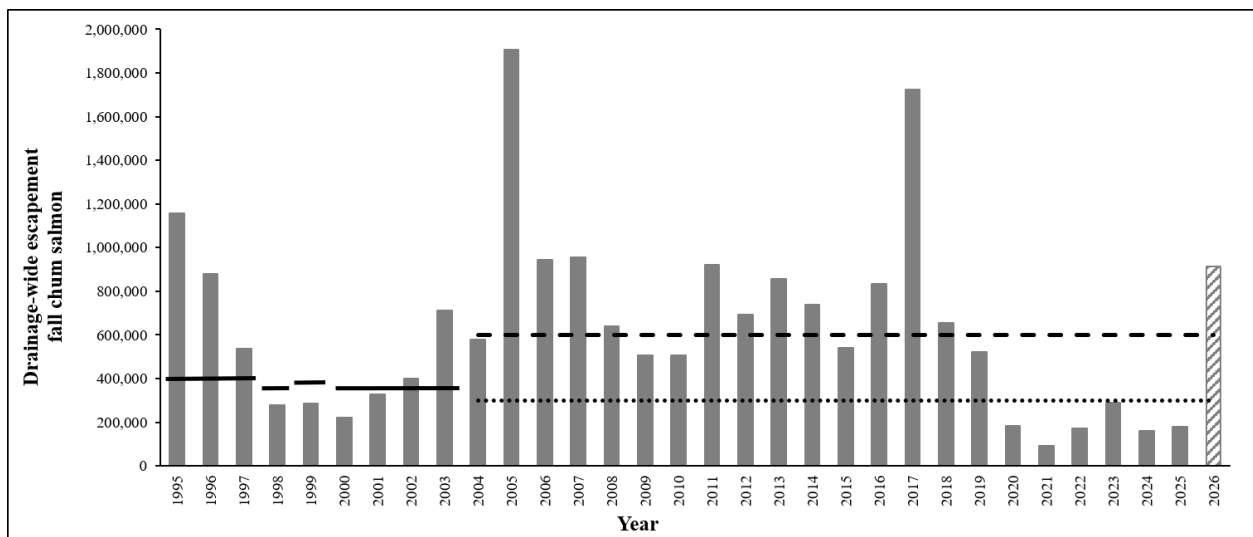


Figure 5. Drainage-wide fall chum salmon spawning escapement estimates are derived from a Bayesian model (1995–2025, JTC Report, Appendix B14, 2026). The estimate for 2026 is preliminary based on genetic mixed stock analysis of fall chum salmon at Pilot Station sonar since July 19. The drainage-wide fall chum salmon escapement goal range (300,000–600,000) is included. Dashed and solid lines indicate the border passage target or range for each year.

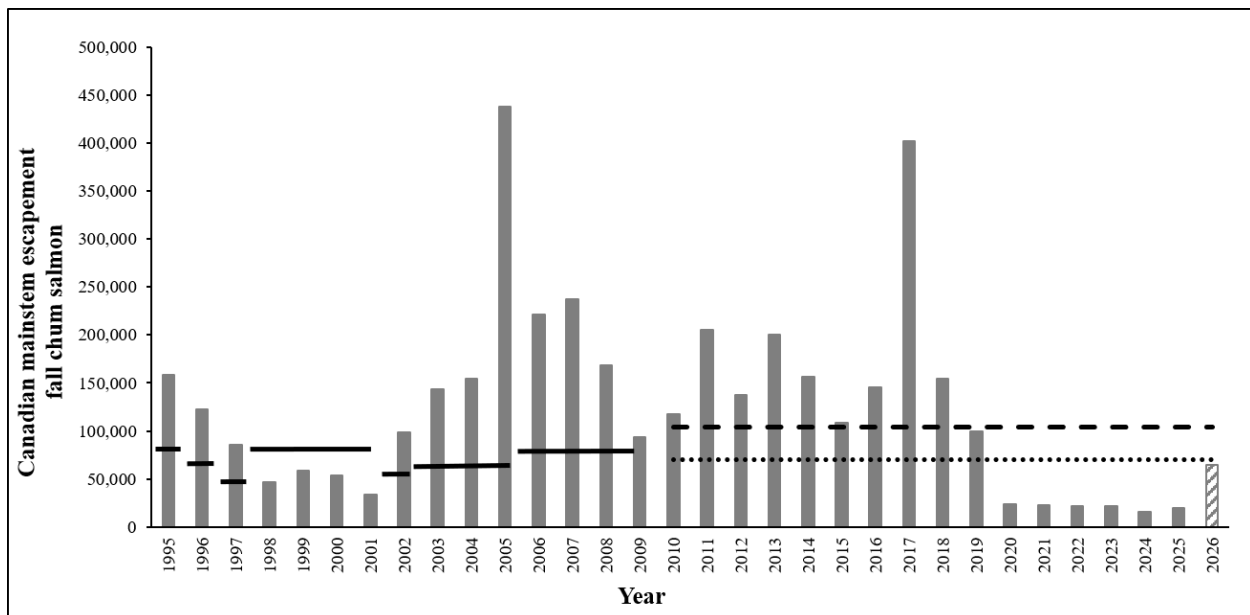


Figure 6. Estimated spawning escapement for Canadian-origin Yukon River mainstem fall chum salmon based on Eagle sonar passage minus estimated harvest above the sonar site (1995–2025, JTC Report, Appendix B16, 2026). The preliminary 2026 estimate is the current end of season fall chum count at Eagle sonar. Dashed and solid lines indicate the border passage target or range for each year, the current escapement goal range is 70,000–104,000.

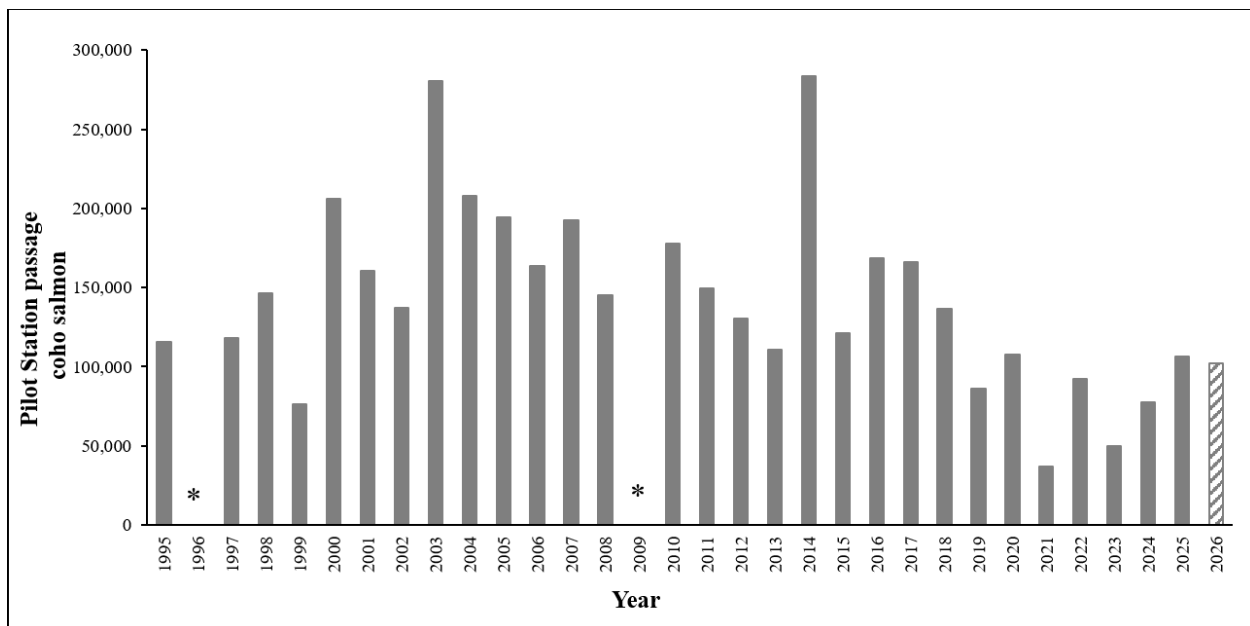


Figure 7. Cumulative passage of coho salmon at Pilot Station sonar from 1995 through 2026 (1995–2025, JTC Report, Appendix A1, 2026, excluding 1996 and 2009). The preliminary estimate for 2026 is the count at Pilot Station sonar. The sonar ceases operation before the coho salmon run is complete, so estimates are considered minimums.