



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge  
P.O. Box 346  
Bethel, Alaska 99559



IN REPLY REFER TO:

**To:** Chair, Western Interior Regional Advisory Council  
**From:** Boyd Blihovde, Refuge Manager  
**Date:** 22 December 2021  
**RE:** 2022 Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Spring Update

The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR) is pleased to submit the following updates as part of this important Regional Advisory Council meeting. Many of our more-detailed information was provided in the Fall meetings, however, these updates will hopefully be viewed as helpful during any votes taken on either fish or wildlife issues.

## Waterfowl:

- The population index for Emperor goose is only 1000 above the closure threshold of 23 thousand. It's been estimated that there's a 50/50 chance that the hunting season for emperor geese will be closed in 2023.
- The regular seasonal field camps are being planned. Seasonal staff to work at field camps are being recruited for. If interested please email Waterfowl Biologist Bryan\_Daniels@fws.gov.

## Mulchatana Caribou:

- The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge staff have been working with both the ADF&G and USFWS coordinators in Dillingham to provide information and outreach on the current harvest closure for this species.
- Conducted tribal consultations focusing primarily on Eek, Kwethluk, Akiak, Akiachuk, and Tuluksak, since the caribou are closest to those communities). The tribal consultations resulted in tribes along the Kuskokwim deciding to protect the Mulchatna Caribou herd in a similar fashion to the moose population during the moratorium.
- At the early part of the season non-law enforcement staff at YDNWR made several observations of harvest during the closure. These observations were circulated to both ADF&G and USFWS law enforcement to provide protection for the herd. Law enforcement was able to make several cases in different communities at around the same time tribal outreach was taking place. One lesson learned for local staff is to have the one-on-one conversations with tribal leaders before the first snows appear in the area. The caribou population got very close to numerous villages before conversations took place. However, the outreach effort was substantial earlier in the Summer and Fall from both ADF&G and USFWS.

## Fisheries:

- Starting on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 the YDNWR began pre-season meetings with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) on upcoming 2022 Salmon Season. Based on preliminary run



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reconstruction data from ADF&G the Refuge believes conservation measures will be necessary in 2022 to protect Chum and Chinook Salmon.

- Refuge Staff will conduct tribal consultations with Kuskokwim River communities starting in late February.
- The Refuge will be working with KRITFC on a smolt enumeration project on the Kwethluk River which will begin in April 2022.
- YDNWR is hiring two seasonal fisheries biologists to coordinate field activities at the smolt trap project, assisting with the Kwethluk Weir, and assisting with Salmon management on the Kwethluk. Anyone interested in a great summer field position should contact- [Spencer\\_Rearden@fws.gov](mailto:Spencer_Rearden@fws.gov).

## Staff Updates:

- Kyra Neal has been hired as the Wildlife Refuge Specialist. She is arriving from Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in Illinois.
- Our Fisheries Biologist Gary Decossas has taken a job as a Biometrician with National Marine Fisheries Service in Mississippi. He is expecting to depart around or after March.

If you would like to know more about subsistence-related activities, please call Aaron P. Moses at (907)-543-1021 or email at [aaron\\_moses@fws.gov](mailto:aaron_moses@fws.gov). You can also reach out to Refuge Manager ([boyd\\_blihovde@fws.gov](mailto:boyd_blihovde@fws.gov)) if you need to discuss anything about the Refuge.